
the ecumenical review

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Contents

- 341 Editorial
- 343 The Word of Life *Pauline Webb*
- 350 A House of Living Stones *Philip Potter*
- Jesus Christ — the Life of the World
- 364 1. Creation, Incarnation and Sanctification *Theodore Stylianopoulos*
- 371 2. The hour comes, and it is now *Allan Boesak*
- 377 3. Life in its fullness *Dorothee Sölle*
- Testimonies
- 385 1. Life in the midst of death *Frieda Haddad*
- 388 2. From death to life *Peter Kuzmic*
- 389 3. The struggle for life *Domitila Barrios de Chungara*
- 391 4. Dying and yet we live . . . *Hyung Kyu Park*
- 393 5. Life in all its fullness *Mother Euphrasia*
- 397 6. A testimony to love *Maria Teresa Porcile Santiso*
- 400 Steps Towards Communication: Impressions from the Dialogue between Theologians of the First and the Third World *Jean-Pierre Thevenaz*
- 405 Ecumenical Chronicle
- 413 Ecumenical Diary
- 426 Significant Ecumenical Journals
- 431 Bibliographia Oecumenica: Significant Ecumenical Titles Available in the World Council of Churches
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The quarterly of the World Council of Churches

Editorial

This issue of *The Ecumenical Review* and the next will mostly carry material presented at the Sixth Assembly of the WCC. Obviously, it is not possible to include all the aspects of the Assembly in these two issues. For fuller information the reader should turn to various publications of the WCC and especially to the official report which will appear later this year. That report will also contain some of the presentations published here, but it was felt that it would be desirable to make available some texts as soon as possible.

The material to be included in the two issues of ER has been roughly divided between those contributions which deal with the Assembly theme and those dealing with the issues discussed in the eight issue groups. The material on the theme is to be found in this issue. It has been somewhat re-grouped. At the Assembly the presentations by J. Stylianopoulos and A. Boesak focused on the general theme "Jesus Christ — the Life of the World". The other presentations were divided according to four sub-themes: Life, a gift of God; Life confronting and overcoming death; Life in its fullness; Life in unity. In reviewing the material for publication it appeared that there was no need to retain the division along the four sub-themes, since there is a great deal of overlap between them. On the other hand, a more helpful distinction can be made in terms of the form. Some of the contributions are systematic treatments while others are more in the form of testimonies, reflecting the particular context and experience out of which the authors are speaking.

Not all the contributions to the theme and the sub-themes made during the plenary sessions could be accommodated in this issue. Some of the more issue-oriented ones will be included in the January issue.

One of the most distinguishing features of the Sixth Assembly was the variety and intensity of its worship. An adequate rendering of the celebrative experience would require other media than merely the printed word. However, within these limits we would like to offer at least one example from the Assembly worship, the sermon preached by P. Webb at the opening service. To some extent that sermon set much of the "tone" for whatever went on in the worship tent in the subsequent two-and-a-half weeks.

In a similar way, the General Secretary's report set the tone for much of what subsequently was said and discussed in the plenary hall. His eight points in particular merit continued study and reflection, hopefully in times and places allowing for a more objective appreciation than was possible within the context of a hectic Assembly schedule.

As a reminder that the Assembly has not totally eclipsed other important ecumenical developments we are including a report on the encounter between third world theologians and their counterparts in the first world that took place earlier this year. The urgency of the problems raised during that encounter and reflected in the report by J.-P. Thevenaz was amply demonstrated during the Vancouver Assembly.

T. W.

The Word of Life

Pauline Webb

“It was there from the beginning; we have heard it; we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell. Our theme is the word of life. This life was made visible; we have seen it and bear our testimony; we here declare to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. And we write this in order that the joy of us all may be complete.”
(1 John 1:1-4)

We begin with enthusiasm. So enthusiastic is this opening paragraph of the first epistle of John that the words tumble out over one another, the grammar is incoherent. But the theme is summed up in a phrase which rings with the confidence of a manifesto — The Word of Life.

The whole passage carries clear echoes of the profound prologue to St John's gospel whose theological scope we shall explore in greater depth in the first plenary session on the main theme of the Assembly, “Jesus Christ — the Life of the World”. But for the moment let us stay with this more immediate personal testimony from one who has found life, real life, abundant life, unending life in encountering Jesus Christ. For that is where the witness of every delegate here begins.

The author of the epistle does not say a lot about himself. He lays no claim to any particular apostolic authority or ecclesiastical status. It is not even clear whether he was himself an eye-witness of the gospel events or whether, like us, he looks back on those events through the eyes of the community of faith. He rests his evidence firmly on that community's continuing experience of the living Christ and on the conviction that to meet Jesus Christ is to come into contact with the very source and goal of life, life that is indestructible by all the forces of sin and death.

To stay with Jesus, to *abide* in him (one of the epistle's favourite words), is to find the meaning of life. And that meaning is love that is sacrificial and invincible, love that is shared in and beyond the community of believers. But the writer knows that he is addressing a community of Christians who are now under dire threat, both from external pressures and from internal dissension. They are living as a minority in Asia Minor at the turn of the first century and they are finding it hard to keep the faith, not because they have ceased to believe in God or become agnostic, but

• Ms WEBB was moderator of the WCC Sixth Assembly Preparatory Committee and is a Methodist lay preacher from the United Kingdom. She gave this sermon at the opening service of the Assembly on 24 July 1983.

because in their hostile environment they are attracted by the Gnostic teaching which claimed that this evil world could not possibly be the domain of a holy god. God must be known through a special kind of spiritual enlightenment quite separate from the life of the world and of the body. Nor could the Gnostics believe that Jesus could have taken on corrupt human flesh. He must have come in angelic, super-human form when he came to rescue God's chosen ones away from the realm of darkness and death.

In answer the author of the epistle said that such teaching was heretical. He is as realistic about the state of things in the world as they are. He too sees it as a place of greed and false pride and only transient value. He acknowledges the wickedness of the human heart. But he is confident that this is God's world, torn as it is by a mutiny, by a rebellion against the laws of God. Christians are called not to withdraw but to engage in the moral struggle with all the optimism of faith that works by love. The writer insists that it is essential to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he has come to live in this world and that he has taken our flesh and blood, that he has suffered and died and risen again and has won the victory over the powers of sin and of death. Therefore to choose Christ is to choose real life, and to abide in him is to come fully alive with a life that begins here and now and is saved for all eternity.

So for the writer of John's Epistle the link between Jesus Christ and the life of the world is no mere hyphen. He is one who has come, does come and will come into the world as God's own word of life, and the community of faith is called to be a medium through which God communicates that living word to his world.

The living word

Our first emphasis must be on that living word. The word of God is never just a spoken or a written word. It is always a happening, a real event.

The excitement with which the epistle begins reminds me of what happened in a nativity play last Christmas in a church back at home. The children were dressed for their annual performance in their fancy clothes, with stars and angels and a pretty baby doll laid in a crib. And suddenly the minister said: "I have a surprise for you", and she brought into the church her own newborn son and placed him in the crib. And Mary and the angels and the shepherds stopped acting their parts and stood on tiptoe with excitement to peer into the crib to see this new baby in their midst. And the diminutive Joseph was heard to exclaim: "We've got a real live Jesus", and as if on cue the baby let out a cry.

We are like those children on tiptoe with expectancy because of what has happened to us. We have seen the reality of Jesus in our midst. Whether it happened to us in some initial intense moment of an almost tangible sense of the presence of Christ that brought us to a point of commitment or whether it has happened to us through the constant nurturing in the sacramental life of the church, it is always through what we have seen and heard and handled that we have come to know the word of life. So if

that word is to be seen and heard and handled in this Assembly in its fullness then it requires of each one of us that “what we have heard and seen with confidence we tell”.

And this Assembly itself will be an event, a happening of the word of God among us. It is no mere quirk that the World Council of Churches recalls past assemblies not so much by their themes nor even by their reports but by the places and dates when they happened. For me the first such event was Uppsala 1968 and I have often reflected that it was the sermon that was not preached, the voice which was silenced by the assassin’s bullet that became one of the most eloquent words spoken in that event. The opening preacher should have been Martin Luther King and we all knew what his theme would have been. But only a few weeks before the Assembly began that dream seemed to lie shattered in the dust and we gathered conscious, some of us perhaps as never before, of the menacing nightmare of racism. But what we had seen and heard then and found so difficult to handle became God’s living word to us and in the event we were all changed by it. The Programme to Combat Racism which emerged from the Assembly itself became a happening through which the world heard and saw what we were saying in opposition to racism far more eloquently than they had ever heard it in any of our resolutions. To some it was an offence, to some it was a word of life.

Then there was Nairobi 1975, the year the UN decreed was to be International Women’s Year. For some of us a new dimension was given to the theme “Jesus Christ frees and unites” by the event that became known as the “women’s session”, a session in which women from many parts of the world opened their hearts and gave expression to the pain they had felt in being excluded from a full partnership with men in the life and leadership of the church. It was as though we were at last free to be heard and recognized for our own worth and with our own gifts. And again it is not the words that were spoken nor the resolutions that were passed that I recall now but the event in itself, an event that led to the whole study process on “The Community of Women and Men in the Church” which for some of us has been life-changing.

And now we have arrived at the beginning of another event. No doubt there will be a torrential flow of words during these coming weeks, but the word that really matters is that which *happens* among us, which becomes embodied and enacted in our lives as we encounter the very word of life.

Speaking in body language

Words are always notoriously difficult things to deal with in international assemblies. Not only do we have to learn to cope with all the apparatus of simultaneous translation. Our ears also need to become much more sensitively tuned to the unique personal and cultural experiences that underlie everyone’s use of a language. We have to hear with our eyes and our hearts as well as our ears. We need to be able to hear even the sound of silence. There is a “body language” more eloquent than speech. The church, the body of Christ, needs to learn that language well if the world is ever to hear clearly what it is trying to say.

Those of us whose business is with the words know how relatively easy it is to process words into typeface, recording tape, and all the paraphernalia of modern communication technology. But we cannot make the word flesh except in the human exchange of life in community.

So as our letter writer says: "What we have heard and seen we declare to you so that you and we together may share a common life, a *koinonia*." That word literally means "sharing with someone in something". In the New Testament we are called to a *koinonia* in the life of Christ, an identifying of our life with his, a sharing symbolized most deeply when we communicate with him in holy communion, where we become the companions of Christ, literally sharing bread and sharing life with him. St Paul calls us too to a *koinonia* of suffering where any suffering of ours should be seen as a part of our sharing in the suffering borne by Christ. And because of this living bond with Christ, which the writer of this epistle stresses, we are led into the community of believers where we are called to identify our lives with one another and to share one another's sufferings.

In an address to the Central Committee in 1980, Philip Potter reminded us that the word *koinos*, common, had the sense of what concerns all and is therefore related to words like communication and community. He contrasted it with the word *idios* which means that which concerns only the individual and from which significantly we derive the word idiotic. The Greeks believed that the individual could only have a fully human life in relation to the life of the whole community.

It is to communicate with one another in such *koinonia* that we come together here in this Assembly, meeting across all the idiotic barriers that the world erects between us. We meet together to share the word of life. Ecumenism itself comes to life as we see the human face of this worldwide community to which we belong.

Maybe you have already begun to capture something of the enthusiasm of such encounters as you have seen all the greeting going on — the hugging and the handshaking, the embracing and the kissing, all according to your ecumenical taste! Many of us are renewing friendships we made in those memorable team visits which have been part of the preparation for this Assembly. So out have come the photographs and the souvenirs, all part of our living experience of *koinonia*. Yet all this can be superficial if it falls short of a genuine sharing of life with life. As I have been watching the greetings I have been reminded of a poem I read in a magazine called *Christian* just at Eastertime this year. It was written by David Williams of Uganda and it's called "We Shook Hands":

We shook hands
 but between us
 stood race and history
 and a jealous present
 Even in that brief grasp
 I felt our two negatives recoil from meeting;
 each sensing the discomfort
 of the unyielding silence
 which was the mark
 only of our defeat

We shook hands and lingered there
 with that firm clasp
 of happy meeting
 equal joy to the visitor as to the visited
 and sitting leisurely down
 we smiled and sighed our greetings
 dipping our fingers into the groundnuts
 we shared.

I hope there will be plenty of opportunity to linger here in this Assembly; in the small groups, along the walk-ways, across the meal tables where we can meet face to face, and share life with life. And as we do so, we shall find that every encounter with another life across the barriers of race and culture and religion is a new encounter with the source of all life. Especially do we welcome among us at this Assembly our guests from other faiths, for we are discovering that in the dialogue with fellow seekers after truth our hearts are opened to receive new insights from the One who is the source of all truth. Let us meet as those who have nothing to defend and everything to share. In the words of the text of John Wesley's sermon on the Catholic Spirit: "Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart? If it is, give me your hand."

There is a price to be paid for the realization of our common life. It can be an experience of both joy and pain. There's all the joy of recognition of familiar faces, but the pain too of the unfamiliarity of so much of their experience. So, like the letter writer, as the days go by our enthusiasm may turn into bewilderment and even disillusionment as we encounter the reality of the divisions between us and the sheer sinfulness of every group of human beings as we jostle one another for positions and power and seek to form some viable organization. But such disillusionment is no harm. No one should live with illusions. And the letter writer would recall us again to our remedy: "If we walk in the light as He himself is in the light we share together a common life and we are being cleansed from every sin by the blood of Jesus his Son." He is himself the remedy of the defilement of our sins and not for our sins only but for the sins of all the world!

Written in blood

Our theme is the word of life, the word communicated through the body and a word written in blood. In his blood shed for us Jesus signs the new testament assuring us of God's forgiveness and bringing us into a new relationship with one another. For we are all made of one blood, not only through our creation but through our salvation, too. In the Epistle of John the writer's only reference to the Old Testament is a reference to Cain, the first man to spill the blood of his brother. His tragedy was not that he had forgotten God but that he had come to God in an idiotic way, wrapped up in his own life, his merits and his achievements and thus he was unable to share in the life of his brother. Instead he became his brother's murderer and thereby alienated himself from the life of God. "Your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground," said the Lord and the same can be said in our world today.

Since we last met in Assembly together as a council of churches eight years ago we have seen that blood spilt in the streets of Soweto and the camps of Beirut, on the mountains of Afghanistan and in the seas of the South Atlantic, in the bomb blasts of Northern Ireland and the continuing carnage of Central America. All over the world, it seems, people are engaged in the bloodletting fanaticism of our time as though human lives were disposable counters in the games of power politics. And the most blatant of all the insanity is the belief that the peace of the nations can only be kept through the balance of terror and that militarism which can now even envisage the slaughter of millions of God's children and the destruction of large areas of his creation is a feasible bargaining factor. And not even the churches have clean hands in the midst of all this bloody mess. We have not spoken in very clear language. Those prophets who have gone into the front line of engagement in the struggle to restore sanity to our world have sometimes had to fight rearguard action with critics in their own community who have questioned their actions or been suspicious of their motives.

But it is still God's world entrusted to the care of human beings who, like good stewards (or maybe today a more familiar analogy would be good secretaries), know how to take right initiatives because they know the mind and the will of the one for whom they work. God has shown us the divine will for his world. In Jesus we are given the human initiative. Through the Spirit we receive the insight to know and do the works of God. And that work, maintains the writer of the Epistle, is always a work of love. The litmus test of our love for God is our love for others, our love expressed not only in the giving of our lives but in the sharing of our goods, our livelihood, with the poor of the world.

And for some that has meant literally laying down their lives. For since we last met we have seen the body of Christ shedding its own blood through the witness of martyrs. We mourn as we meet one who was known personally to many of us here, Archbishop Luwum of Uganda. We remember Archbishop Romero of El Salvador. We recall one who was a member of this Assembly's preparatory committee, Bishop Samuel of Egypt, and a whole company of others, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, and who died with their clothes stained with the blood of sacrifice, blood freely given for the poor and the oppressed in the struggle for justice and in the ministry of reconciliation.

The shedding of blood can be a symbol of creation and life rather than of destruction and death. For a woman the shedding of blood which is sometimes thought of as a curse is in fact a blessing. It is a sign that her body is being prepared to give birth if and when life is conceived within her. And even if she personally never knows the privilege of motherhood, the instincts and energies released within her can be used by God in the partnership of sustaining and nourishing his children, especially those who are neglected, deprived or robbed of their full human dignity. She is called to magnify life wherever it is diminished, as, like Mary, the mother of Jesus, she magnifies the Lord.

Jesus compared his disciples to a pregnant woman. While the world waits hopefully she must agonize and labour to bring to birth the life hidden within her.

We live in a world pregnant with his coming kingdom. We share the travail and the labour and the sweat of bringing to birth that new age of the son of God, to whom, as the writer of the epistle puts it, the spirit, the water and the blood bear witness. Here in this Assembly, may we, through our common ministry, baptism and eucharist, learn how to bear witness effectively and eventfully to the faith that overcomes this evil world, faith in the Son of God in whom we are given the gift of eternal life.

Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.

A House of Living Stones

Philip Potter

May I once again greet you warmly at this Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver. This is the second time in the thirty-five years of its existence that the Council's Assembly has met in North America. The last time was the Second Assembly at Evanston, Illinois, in the USA, in 1954, with the theme, "Jesus Christ the Hope of the World". We gathered together then, at a time of fear and despair, in the midst of the confrontation between the East and West and the struggles of peoples for political, economic and racial justice around the world. The witch-hunt of McCarthyism was raging in the USA, and its effects were felt in the Assembly. And yet, we were able to say together in the Message:

Here where we stand (under the judgment of God and in the shadow of death), Jesus stood with us. He came to us, truly divine and truly human, to seek and to save. Though we were the enemies of God, Christ died for us. We crucified him, but God raised him from the dead. He is risen. He has overcome the powers of sin and death. A new life has begun. And in his risen and ascended power, he has sent forth into the world a new community, bound together by his spirit, sharing his divine life, and commissioned to make him known throughout the world.¹

These words are still appropriate as we meet nearly thirty years later under the theme: "Jesus Christ — the Life of the World". We come to Vancouver as those who share the divine life in Christ and desire to offer it in all its fullness to the peoples of the world. In contrast to the Evanston Assembly, we meet now as a much more representative gathering of people from all over the world. We meet, too, under an even darker cloud of fear and despair. The confrontation between East and West and between North and South, and the conflicts within countries between sexes, races, classes and religions, have become much fiercer and more complex. The very survival of the human race is daily threatened.

At the Fifth Assembly in Nairobi in 1975, we had a feeling of being in the wilderness, as the children of Israel were after the Exodus, full of doubts and fears. Nevertheless, despite the pain and conflicts we experienced during that meeting, there was no retreat from the positions we had taken and the programmes we had launched after the Fourth Assembly at

• Dr POTTER delivered this address as the General Secretary's report to the WCC's Sixth Assembly in Vancouver, 24 July-10 August 1983.

¹ *Evanston Report*, p. 1.

Uppsala in 1968. Indeed, we committed ourselves to go forward and undertake more specific, even controversial programmes in obedience to our calling. When we examine the official report, *Nairobi to Vancouver*, we can see that in the wilderness of our time we have been able to receive and proclaim God's word of life. We have had contact with a wider variety of people and more churches have been visited than ever before. We have laboured for the unity of the Church and for the renewal of humankind. We have tried to meet human need in every part of the globe, and to be in solidarity with the oppressed and the deprived. We have spoken and acted in situations of conflict.

There is a profound sense in which the Church is by its very nature always in the wilderness on its pilgrim way to the City of God or, as the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, to the world (*oikoumene*) to come (2:5). The Church is the people of God created and consecrated through the Exodus in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is called to participate in the sufferings of Christ for the salvation of our broken, divided world. At the beginning of the Church's history it was seen as a community of people scattered all over the Roman Empire, having no legal or social status, and subject to harassment, persecution and death.

It was to such diaspora churches that the First Letter of Peter was addressed. We have been drawing from that Letter one of the "Images of Life" in our Bible studies in preparation for this Assembly — the image of "The House made of Living Stones" which is intended to be an image of the Church. I invite you to meditate on what it means to be "the house of living stones" in a hostile world which nevertheless yearns to be such a house, a living community of sharing in justice and peace. This biblical meditation should help us to reflect on what we have learned during these thirty-five years of the existence of the World Council of Churches about the nature and calling of the churches and about the Council as a fellowship of churches.

Peter exhorts the diaspora churches:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by people, but in God's sight chosen and precious: and like living stones be yourselves constantly built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

Christ is God's delegated and precious living stone. The Psalmist declared, "the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (118:22); so Christ, rejected and crucified, is now the risen, life-giving Lord. That is the foundation of our faith and the basis of the World Council of Churches.

Actually, according to the Gospels, it was Jesus himself who drew attention to this Psalm, which is the last of a group of Psalms called *Hallel* (Praise) and sung during and after the great feasts at Jerusalem (Ps. 111-118). Ps. 118 was sung after the Passover — the meal which served as the binding force of the people of Israel on the eve of the Exodus. Jesus quoted this verse of Ps. 118 in his controversy with the religious authorities who plotted his death (Mark 12:1-12), on the eve of what Luke called his exodus (Luke 9:31). He spoke to his disciples of being rejected and killed

and of rising again after three days (Mark 8:31). In recalling his experience with Jesus and what he learned from it, Peter is saying to the diaspora churches in Asia Minor, as he says to us today, that confessing Christ means entering into his sufferings and sharing his risen life. He invites them and us to keep on coming day after day to Christ the living stone, so that we may ourselves become living stones, share his life and continue his ministry of suffering for humankind in joyful hope.

But becoming living stones means that believers and communities of believers do not remain isolated, alone, petrified, dead. They are made alive and are being built into a house, an *oikos* which is enlivened by the Spirit. Christ is the cornerstone, and the Spirit enables those who come to Christ to be built into this house.

A living house

The word "house" was rich in meaning for the peoples of the ancient Middle East. It signified community, nation, culture, way of life, structure as well as environment. Abraham was called by God out of his father's *bayith*, or *oikos* — that is, out of his nation and culture to form a new *oikos*, a house based on faith in and obedience to God (Gen. 12:2; 15:6; 17:12-13). This new house, this new people of God found themselves swallowed up into "the house of bondage" in Egypt. They were delivered from Pharaoh (a word which comes from the Egyptian *per-aa*, the Great House) through the Exodus and were made "the house of Israel". That is to say, they were given a way of life based on their deliverance from Egypt and directed by the liberating word of the Covenant (Ex. 19-23). As a means of keeping the house of Israel fully and continuously conscious of the nature of their existence and task there was established the house of God, the place of worship, the temple, where people offered their life and their labour to God and received his renewing grace.

The drama of Israel was that again and again they lost their loyalty to the founder of the house and accommodated themselves to the ethical and spiritual attitudes of the surrounding cultures or *oikoi*. They also failed to live as a household according to the covenant, to share a common life in truth, justice and peace. Hence the prophets again and again challenged them, as for example, Jeremiah when he told them:

Do not trust in these deceiving words: "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever. ... Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord (Jer. 7:4-7, 11).

For Jeremiah the people of God, the house of Israel, are founded on certain qualities and obligations: justice and mercy, and utter loyalty to God, the Lord of the house. These are based on the Torah, the Law, the words of the Covenant. A house is truly built on those qualities which enable its inhabitants to live together in community and in common

wellbeing, *shalom*. Where these qualities are lacking the house cannot stand. Institutions and structures acquire a demonic character when people lose that strength of being, that clear integrity and sense of purpose which enable them to discern, correct and change their situation. There comes a time, therefore, when existing structures have to be destroyed in order that new structures, a new *oikos*, can be built up based on a new covenant and enabling people to be responsible for themselves and for one another before God (Jer. 31 : 27-34). This is what Jesus meant when he said that the old temple would be destroyed in his crucifixion and that he would rebuild it in three days through his resurrection (John 2 : 19-21).

Peter affirms that in the crucified and risen Christ this new house has been built and that all who come to him are living stones forming an integral part of the house, sharing a common life and offering their whole life and that of all to God in the Spirit and through Jesus Christ. He goes on to adopt in a new way some of the other ancient images for Israel when he calls believers "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pet. 2 : 9a). Believers, as living stones, overcome the separations of racism and become the true human race made in the image of God. Both women and men become the priests of the king and ruler of their lives, offering themselves and the world to God through their worship and their witness. Nationalism with all its exclusivist attitudes gives place to a community consecrated to God and his purpose to unite all nations in their diversity into one house. All are the people of God as a sign of God's plan to unite all peoples into one human family in justice and peace. It is this house which is called to proclaim the wonderful deeds of God who called it out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2 : 9). This is Peter's way of confessing the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church".

It is this image and understanding of the living house which has motivated the ecumenical movement. As is well known, the word ecumenical is derived from the Greek word *oikoumene*, meaning the whole inhabited earth. It is a word which came into common use when Alexander the Great was conquering the world of the Middle East and beyond. The intention was that peoples should give up their cultural isolation and participate in a cosmopolitan life through which they would discover their true humanity. That was the *oikoumene*. When the Romans conquered the Hellenists, their rulers were hailed as lords and saviours of the *oikoumene*.

Against this background we can understand how this word was appropriated by the Greek translators of the Old Testament and the writers of the New Testament. In Psalm 24 : 1 we read: "The earth is the Lord's and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it." Not Caesar, but Yahweh, the one who has been and is present in the world, is the Lord and Saviour of the *oikoumene*, ruling it in truth, justice and peace, and manifesting God's purpose through the covenant people, the house of Israel. God's purpose is that the whole *oikoumene* will recognize God as the true Lord and Saviour. It is through God that true humanity becomes a promise and a reality. In the New Testament we are told, for example, of Paul and his companions preaching at Thessalonica and of their forming a house church. They are accused before the city authorities as "people who have

turned the world, the *oikoumene*, upside down... and are acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:6-7).

The ecumenical movement is, therefore, the means by which the churches which form the house, the *oikos* of God are seeking so to live and witness before all peoples that the whole *oikoumene* may become the *oikos* of God through the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the life-giving Spirit. The World Council of Churches was formed in 1948 precisely to be a means of enabling this process to take place in the totality of the life and witness of the churches in response to the totality of God's claim on the life of the *oikoumene*. What then have we learned during this ecumenical journey of thirty-five years about the nature and calling of the churches which have committed themselves to the fellowship of the World Council of Churches?

The reflections which follow are based on my experience and active involvement in the life of the Council from 1948. They should also be read alongside my introduction to the official report, *Nairobi to Vancouver*.

A fellowship of confessing

First, we have been learning to be a fellowship of confessing. In fact, according to its basis, the World Council is "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit".

After centuries of separation the churches have been drawn together in a fellowship of confessing communities which live "according to the scriptures". It is through the biblical renewal of the past fifty years that the churches themselves have been heeding the words of Peter: "The time has come for judgment to begin with the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). That was the revolutionary discovery of Martin Luther, the 500th anniversary of whose birth we celebrate this year. He brought back to the centre of the life of the Church the sovereignty of God's judging and redeeming word, that it may constantly be reformed in order to become a true house of living stones.

Through the World Council the churches have been constrained to share with one another the ways in which they confess their faith and have, through mutual correction, from time to time become conscious of their own failure to live up to the claims of the gospel. The ecumenical movement is first of all a call to the churches to penitence, a change of heart and mind in the direction of the offer and demand of Christ, the living stone, and a greater openness to confess together their faith boldly and joyfully in the storm of the world's life.

I want to give one illustration of the ways we have advanced as a fellowship of confessing. When the Orthodox churches and the churches of the Reformation got together to form the World Council, there was great diffidence between them. Apart from the fact that they did not accept each other as churches in the full sense, there was also a history of proselytism — churches confessing their faith in a competing way and seeking to win converts from other churches. At the Third Assembly at New Delhi, 1961,

when the International Missionary Council was integrated into the World Council, there was an agreed statement on “Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty”. The churches were called upon to disavow all forms of proselytism so as to render their common witness to Christ more faithful and more convincing. In the same spirit the Second Vatican Council produced a Declaration on Religious Liberty in 1965. Then in 1970 the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches issued a study document on “Christian Witness and Proselytism” where the emphasis was already more on common witness. By 1980, the same Joint Working Group agreed to publish a statement on “Common Witness”, giving many stories of ways in which Christian communities have been confessing their faith together in word and act. The churches have thus been enabled, through the World Council, to clear away many obstacles to their common witness, whether as churches, base communities, or action groups. This amazing fact has too often been taken for granted.

Moreover, we have been learning the meaning of the words of Peter’s letter: “In your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with modesty and reverence” (3 : 15). I do not here refer to the notable theological reflections carried out on “Giving an Account of the Hope that is in Us”, but rather to the way in which the churches have been encouraged to carry out a dialogue with people of living faiths and ideologies and with those without faith. The nature of dialogue is as Peter presents it. Even as we reverence Christ, so must we reverence those with whom we have dialogue as an encounter of life with life. In a profound sense Christ is present besides the other putting his or her claim upon us. Therefore, we must be ready to listen to the other to receive a word of judgment and promise, with the scriptures as our criterion, and be open to be renewed in faith as we pray that God’s Spirit will do God’s own work with the other. In this spirit, the churches and Christians are being renewed to be confessing communities, and so facilitate the building of “the house of living stones”.

A fellowship of learning

Secondly, we have gained a fresh understanding of the churches as a fellowship of learning. Of course, this has been a characteristic of the Church from the very beginning. Peter uses a very moving image to describe what happens to those who are baptized — who, as in the early church on the eve of Easter, put off their old clothes and descend into the waters of baptism and are crucified with Christ and rise from the waters in the risen Christ and put on new clothes. Before he evokes the image of the house of living stones, he writes:

Put off all malice and deceit, and insincerity and jealousy and recrimination of every kind. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; for you have tasted that the Lord is good (2 : 1-3).

The Christian is like a newborn baby who eagerly sucks at its mother’s warm breast to receive the food which will enable it to grow and be a

person in its own right. Learning is that intimate process of tasting the goodness of God, what God has done and wills to be done that the world may become truly a home (*oikos*). Peter quotes Psalm 34 which describes how we learn the goodness of God in the travail of our existence with others in the world.

Learning in the Bible is a process by which people relate to God and God's way of truth, righteousness and peace, that they may in obedience practise that way in relation to each other and extending to the nations. Moses declares:

The Lord said to me: "Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to reverence me all the days that they live upon the earth and that they may teach their children." ... And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances, that you might do them in the land which you are going over to possess (Deut. 4: 10,14).

And the prophet Isaiah prays to God:

My soul yearns for thee in the night,
my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee.
For when thy judgments are in the earth,
the inhabitants learn righteousness (Isa. 26: 9).

In these and many other passages in the Old and New Testaments we discern that learning does not mean simply acquiring knowledge or skills, or being intellectually equipped, or just memorizing some catechism of faith. Rather it means so entering with our whole being and with all the people into a relationship with God through God's self-revelation, that our horizons are widened and our wills are strengthened to be right with God and with one another in word and deed. Isaiah indicates clearly the global motivation of learning; he says that when believers yearn for God, like the baby at its mother's breast, this is no individual or parochial matter. They do so as those who dwell in the *oikoumene* and whose life should be governed by righteousness — right relations with God and others. Learning involves a global consciousness of God's will and way. This is a concept which is incredibly difficult to communicate through present mass media and educational structures and programmes.

It is not surprising therefore that the World Council has put a lot of emphasis on ecumenical learning during these last years. All its programmes and meetings are means by which people allow themselves to be opened to the realities of God's word in the context of the harsh realities of our world. They do so by being opened to each other and being opened to go beyond their local ways of thinking and acting. This Assembly is a living example of what we mean by ecumenical learning. So, too, are the many team visits between our churches which have helped to prepare us for this event. Such learning is a precondition for any effective action in the cause of truth, peace and justice, and the building of true community. However, it has to be admitted that this perception of learning has not been sufficiently built into the programmes of the World Council and that the churches themselves have not sufficiently appropriated the insights and perspectives received through this process of ecumenical learning. And insofar as we fail to take such learning seriously, we fail to become a house of living stones.

A fellowship of participation

Thirdly, we have become acutely aware that the churches should be a fellowship of participation. In fact, in New Testament Greek, *koinonia* was the word for “fellowship” and “participation”; it meant a community which is bound together in mutual support, service and sharing. Peter’s image of the house of living stones also points to this *koinonia*. He speaks of “a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2 : 5), and later of “a royal priesthood” (2 : 9).

One of the great merits of the Reformation was the discovery, based on this very word of Peter, that everyone — woman and man alike — is a priest before God, offering the life of the world to God and receiving his or her life through the eucharistic sacrifice of Christ for the life of the world. But it is one of the curiosities of our history as churches that this conviction that we are a holy, consecrated priesthood, a priesthood which owes its allegiance to the king and ruler of our lives, has degenerated into a kind of individualistic, pietistic religion. This has, on the one hand, destroyed a sense of our mutual accountability and our common bond as the house of living stones. On the other hand, it has exposed the churches to various forms of hierarchical and institutional exclusiveness, with a concentration of power in bureaucratic ways which are alien to all that God had ordained and promised to the people of Israel — that all the earth was God’s and that they should be a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19 : 6). God willed that God’s people should act as priests of the king and ruler of the earth sustaining and caring for the earth as God cares for them. Instead we have followed the ways of the rulers of the earth and created stratified and petrified structures of power in the churches, thus depriving us of our true priesthood to the world and of being living, dynamic stones fitted into a growing, habitable house for all.

This has been a persistent concern of the ecumenical movement. We have reminded each other that the Church is, as Peter affirmed, the people, *laos*, of God, and not principally the ordained ministry which, though indispensable, constitutes less than 1% of the house of living stones. We have endeavoured to encourage the churches to recognize that young people are not the church of tomorrow but of today. More insistently in recent years we have painfully tried to come to terms with the fact that the house of living stones is a community of women and men fulfilling a common ministry of witness and service to the world. We recall that the first account we have of the Lord’s Supper, what we call holy communion, is given by Paul when he rebukes the rich, upper-class members of the church in Corinth for excluding the poorer and socially despised members (1 Cor. 11 : 17-34). We are also learning to recognize the right and privilege of the disabled to participate as living members of the body of Christ.

Our communion in the body and blood of Christ, our spiritual sacrifices, the offering of the gift of the spirit we have received, demands that we exorcise the heresies of magisterial authority and power in the church and become a true priesthood of all believers among whom the gifts and functions are not imposed but mutually accepted, whether ordained or lay. At the heart of our divisions as churches is this disparity and concentration of

power in the life of the churches, which weakens our credibility in a world which is full of power-grabbing and individualism. The challenge to the churches and to the Council is, therefore, how far we are willing to be obedient to the convictions of our faith that we really become a priesthood of the whole house of living stones, dedicated to God and God's kingly rule, sharing God's gifts as we offer them to the world. That is what is involved in being a fellowship of participation exercising, in love, our priestly task by being with and among the people.

A fellowship of sharing

Fourthly, we have experienced the blessing of the churches being a fellowship of sharing. Since the end of World War II, while the World Council of Churches was still in process of formation, churches have shown a clear will to share their resources as a demonstration of being a house of living stones, crossing the barriers of division caused by war and political conflicts, and meeting human need wherever it arose and with no other motive than caring love. We are now in a difficult process of developing, within the Council itself, means by which we can show the inter-related character of our sharing of material, technical and above all spiritual resources.

Peter develops his image of the house of living stones by urging the diaspora churches:

Above all hold unflinching your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practise hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Pet. 4:8-10).

God's grace, his self-giving love, has been manifest in Christ, he who gave his body and blood for us and for the world. We share his grace through his gifts, *charismata*, which are for the good functioning of the house. That is why we are called stewards, *oikonomoi*, "economists" whose basic understanding of policy is love. Peter also reminds us that Christ's bearing of our sins in his body means that we might die to our selfish rebellion from God and become "alive to righteousness, justice" (2:24), a term which for Peter, who was brought up in the Hebrew tongue, meant right relations with God and therefore with one another — the relationship of sharing the life which God has given us.

It has become fashionable to accuse the World Council and some churches of being too involved in social and economic concerns. This very accusation raises the question of how the churches themselves relate to one another. There is far too little real sharing within and between the churches, not only of material and technical resources which so much dominates our thinking, but of all the gifts of grace which we have received. We have learned in the ecumenical movement that our disunity as churches is in large measure due to our incapacity to practise this genuine sharing of gifts. We tend too much to hang on to the inherited forms of power and prestige and to the petrifying habit of self-sufficiency or of obsequious begging.

There is another element in this fellowship of sharing. Within and around the churches are Christian groups or communities which are

seeking to use the gifts of the Spirit in ways which are renewing and enriching for all, often to the point of suffering and even death. But the gifts of these groups are not well shared among themselves and with the churches in each country. The churches are sometimes very aloof from these groups, and the groups are equally aloof from the churches' institutional authorities. This is a particularly acute issue for the World Council, because many of its programmes are carried out with the active groups which dare to use their gifts for the life of the world in personal, costly ways. This has often exacerbated the relations between the churches and the Council. How do we get out of this impasse? How can we together develop a fellowship of sharing, remembering that fellowship and sharing are in fact one reality, *koinonia*, the communion in the body of Christ for the life of the world? This is one of the critical issues to which I hope this Assembly will address itself.

A fellowship of healing

Fifthly, we have been learning that the churches are called to be a fellowship of healing. The Council and the churches have been greatly helped to understand this through a series of consultations around the world on "Health, Healing and Wholeness". The operative understanding of health now emerging is that it is "... a dynamic state of wellbeing of the individual and of society; of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political and social wellbeing; of being in harmony with each other, with the material environment and with God". It is this holistic approach to health which has caught our attention, and which is demonstrated in the healing ministry of Jesus.

Scientists have discovered that matter, and especially the body, is not a mechanistic phenomenon. Therefore, when any part of the mechanism is not functioning properly it cannot be treated in isolation. The body is indeed an organism in which both body and mind, our social and natural environment play a decisive role. We have to be enabled to participate in the process of understanding the interconnectedness of the house of our bodies in terms of the house of our environment. We must be permitted to share in the process of healing, through mobilizing the stronger elements to support the weaker. Above all, our total state of being in living fellowship with God is essential for health, even if the body dies. There is a healthy and unhealthy way of dying.

This view of health challenges the separations we have created by our present ways of looking at the world and of operating, whether in church or society. We divide the soul from the body, the mind from matter, rational thought from feeling. These dualisms have played havoc with our world, but even more in the churches which have developed these dualisms in systems of dogmas, ethical norms, and attitudes towards persons and society which are quite alien to our biblical and especially Christian heritage. Pursuing his image of the house of living stones, Peter refers to Isaiah 53, saying that it was by the wounds of Christ's whole self-offering that we are healed (2: 24). In this way he calls us to live for righteousness, justice, being in right relations with God and with one other and, we must add, with our environment.

The image of the house of living stones is relevant here, because it calls for an understanding of our life as churches in which the house is made up of the living stones being fitted together and functioning as a whole beyond the separateness which marks our existence. The only separateness which our faith entertains is that separateness or holiness which means our total devotion and orientation to the triune God, whose inner being and manifestation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is that of mutual exchange, co-inherence within the divine life. It is this co-inherence in our life together which makes for wholeness and peace, that integrated wellbeing, when even death is swallowed up into victory.

There is a great need in this area for the churches and the Council to rethink their theological and ethical systems and their style of life, and to overcome their indifference to the natural environment. The image of the house of living stones includes the whole *oikoumene*, the whole cosmos in which people and all living things have their being.

A fellowship of reconciliation

Sixthly, we have become deeply mindful of our calling as churches and as a Council to be a fellowship of reconciliation. We have, indeed, been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). This is particularly urgent at a time of fierce confrontation, the hurling of anathemas between nations and peoples, especially the powerful ones, and the helpless drift to the apocalyptic annihilation of the *oikoumene*. As Peter reminds us, the churches are diaspora communities, barely tolerated minorities, ignored, reviled or persecuted if they take a stand for the way of reconciliation. When, therefore, Peter calls these scattered communities to become a house of living stones, and to assume the sufferings of Christ for the world, he is calling for a courageous confrontation with the forces of evil and destruction in the world.

Peter does not shirk the fact that reconciliation is not possible without bringing out, rather than pushing under the table, the things which are contrary to God's purpose for his creation. In his image of the stone, he also quotes from Isaiah 8:14-15. It is instructive to quote the full passage:

The Lord said: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken." (Isa. 8:11-15)

Isaiah warns the house of Israel that they should not be seduced by the power games that were going on in the surrounding nations, nor should they make alliances, or for fear be submissive to one side of the conflicts or another. They should expose the conflicts between the powers as denials of the covenant purpose of God, because the outcome of such conflicts is that all will be broken on the rock of offence to God's will and purpose. It has been a continuing task of the World Council to analyze and expose the underlying causes of injustice and war and to work for the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

It was that great early ecumenical pioneer, John R. Mott, who used to say: "We must turn our stumbling blocks into stepping stones." The Chinese characters for "crisis" are *wei ji*, which mean "danger" — "opportunity". At this dangerous time in which we meet as an Assembly, I hope that we who represent the house of living stones, coming from the diaspora, will take a clear and unequivocal stand for God's will for peace and justice, which are inextricably bound together, and will not be tempted to echo the doomed policies of the nations from which we come. The credibility of the gospel of reconciliation is at stake here. It is significant, in this regard, to remember that the Sermon on the Mount, which calls us to such a ministry of reconciliation, ends with the image of two houses — one built on sand which is bound to fall, and one built on the rock of God's way of peace. The world will be watching us to know whether we will meet the test of being truly a house of living stones, built on the rock of faith in God who wills peace for all, and the rights of all to be fully themselves whatever their creed or sex or race or class or nation.

A fellowship of unity

Seventhly, we have tried to be attentive to the prayer of our Lord that we should be a fellowship of unity. I have mentioned this central calling and task of the ecumenical movement and of the churches at this point, because many are all too prone to say that the World Council is indifferent to our primary task of becoming what we are in the work of God in Christ, one house of living stones offering the eucharistic sacrifice as one people who are destined to offer the sacrifice of their lives for the unity of the *oikoumene*. On the contrary, I have mentioned this essential calling of the churches here precisely because all that has been said before is about the confession of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

We can claim notable advances in the way towards unity, especially during these thirty-five years. We started timidly and with much mutual suspicion by covenanting to stay together. We tried to describe as openly and honestly as possible to each other the major doctrinal blocks to unity. We moved from there to consider our given unity in the undivided Christ whose crucified and risen life we share, and pledged to let this Christ do his work among us as we seek to be obedient to him. We have since expressed the goal of unity in each place and in all places and all ages in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ that the world may believe. We have gone further and engaged in bilateral and multilateral discussions between the different communions, and the Council has assisted in bringing these together into a forum of assessing where we are and where we are going. We see the way forward in working for conciliar fellowship, expressed in various ways, however feebly, not least in the World Council. And we have now asked the churches to facilitate a process by which the congregations can be involved in receiving convergent statements on baptism, eucharist and ministry.

The reactions so far received on this long march towards unity are mixed. But they certainly are marked by the fact that the churches have not yet sufficiently advanced in being a fellowship of confessing, of learning, of

participation, of sharing, of healing, and of reconciliation, to overcome the stumbling blocks which have deeply divided them. Unity consists in the living stones being constantly built into the house of the living God and not in rearrangements within static structures. It is an interrelated process in which the diaspora churches are engaged.

I hope therefore that all that we say and decide during this Assembly will be judged by whether it promotes the unity of God's people as the house of living stones and as a sign and sacrament of God's design to unite all peoples as the *oikoumene* under the loving rule of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A fellowship of expectancy

Finally, we have learned afresh during these years that the churches are a fellowship of expectancy. Their existence is not an end in itself. They point to and are called to be a sign of the kingdom of God. Their constant prayer is: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The image of the house of living stones is based on an act of celebration:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1 : 3-5).

At this Assembly we shall be overwhelmed with the dangers facing our world. Some may be tempted to adopt an attitude of resignation as though all that is necessary is that we keep the faith and let the world go up in flames, an attitude which often goes along with accommodation with the deathly military policies of the powers. Many will be impatient that we are not doing enough and urgently enough to proclaim the gospel to the world, or to work for peace and justice for all, or to achieve the unity of the churches. We are called to be steadfast in faith, and we will not shrink from speaking and acting boldly in hope and love.

Nevertheless, we can only do this as we celebrate our faith in Christ the living stone and as living stones being fitted together into the house of God. Our worship, our prayers, our sharing of our faith with one another will be central to all we say and do. But, as Peter tells the diaspora churches, our living hope as those born anew through the living and abiding word of God (1 : 23) and as those who taste that the Lord is good, must make us enter into the sufferings of the world as we share the sufferings of Christ. The way ahead is one of pain and suffering, of persecution and death for many. It is the way of faithful living by the deeds of God, but it is also the way of joy. As Peter says:

Rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Pet. 4 : 13).

* * *

What does all this say to us about the nature and calling of the churches and of the Council? Soon after the Council was formed, there was a big

debate about “the ecclesiological significance of the World Council of Churches” at the Central Committee meeting in Toronto in 1950. It was recognized that the Council “represents a new and unprecedented approach to the problem of interchurch relationships” and that it “exists to break the deadlock between the churches”. Over thirty years after, we are able to say that the calling of the churches to be a fellowship of confessing, of learning, of participation, of sharing, of healing, of reconciliation, of unity and of expectancy, has precisely been the preoccupation and task of the World Council. What consequences does this reality pose for the churches and for the Council?

Can the churches go on behaving as though the Council belongs to their external rather than their internal relations? Can the Council allow itself, through the decisions of representatives of the churches, to go its own way with programmes and activities reaching to groups and others, but not conceived, planned, communicated at all stages, and carried out with the active involvement of the churches? Can the churches conduct themselves as though they exist in isolation from each other and from their fellowship in the World Council, carrying on their programmes and activities with little relation with other churches around the world? Can we go on acting as though we are just stones ineffectually scattered around, or shall we allow ourselves to be living stones being gathered together and built into the house of our triune God? Certainly, Peter’s image of the house of living stones reminds us of the inescapable fact that it is only as the churches relate to each other as living stones that they will discover new realities about their essential calling to be the Church, the house of the triune God. And this common calling demands a fellowship of confessing, learning, participating, sharing, healing, reconciliation, unity and expectancy, to the glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The task of the World Council of Churches, as well as of regional and local councils, is to promote this common calling.

At Nairobi in 1975 I reminded the Fifth Assembly that it would “have failed in its purpose if we did not advance to a new covenant relationship between the member churches at all levels of their life and the World Council at all levels of its activities”. This reminder is even more urgent here at Vancouver, especially because during this period the relations between several member churches and the Council have been strained, and the Council has come under heavy attack from the media for the actions it has taken in response to the mandate of the Assembly and of the Central Committee. However, our fellowship has become deeper and more lively as we have faced the conflicts openly and frankly under the victorious cross of Christ.

There is no life without sharing. Our theme, “Jesus Christ — the Life of the World” is a clear call to let his life permeate our life together as we go forward in hope and with joyous courage to be living stones built into the house which will point to God’s *oikoumene* being filled with his life.

Jesus Christ — the Life of the World

1. Creation, incarnation and sanctification

Theodore Stylianopoulos

Glory to God who lives and reigns for ever!

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one kingdom, one power, one life!

Glory to the sovereign Lord “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty!” (Rev. 1 : 8, RSV) “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever” (Rom. 11 : 36).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, one of the joys of faith which has sustained Orthodox Christians through many centuries of persecution is the celebration of Easter. Holy Pascha, as we call it, is a new passover, a passing from death to life, a festival of life, lights, and joy. With lighted candles in our hands, we spend much of Pascha morning singing hymns to Christ, victor over death and giver of life:

The day of resurrection! Let us be radiant in splendour!

Pascha of the Lord! Christ, our God, has led us from death to life, from earth to heaven!

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling death by death,
and to those in the tombs granting life!

St John's prologue

For the paschal liturgy the appointed gospel reading is the prologue of St John, the magnificent hymnic expression of the faith of the church in all ages that Christ is life, truth, and grace. Let us join in spirit the saints of all times and places in confessing “Jesus Christ — the Life of the World” by reciting with one heart St John's prologue as a hymn to Christ.

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In the beginning was the word,
and the word was with God,
and the word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him,
and without him was not anything made that was made.
In him was life, and the life was the light of humankind.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light that enlightens every person was coming to the world.
He was in the world, and the world was made through him,
yet the world knew him not.
He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God,
who were born, not of blood
nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us,
full of grace and truth;
we have beheld his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father.

And from his fullness have we all received grace upon grace.
For the law was given through Moses;
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
No one has ever seen God;
the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father,
he has made him known.

(John 1 : 1-5, 9-14, 16-18)

My brothers and sisters, by faith we have gathered in this hospitable city of Vancouver from all around the globe, from Russia to South Africa, from England to Argentina, from Japan to India, that we may both confess and also witness to Christ as the true life, the giver of life, and the life of the world. What an enormous challenge! We have come together relying not “on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1 : 9), that we may lift up Jesus Christ who was lifted up on the cross that the world may live.

The early Christian hymn that we read a few moments ago extols Jesus Christ, the pre-existent and incarnate word of God, as the cosmic mystery of God’s revelation in all things, especially in human beings. The pre-existent word, the life and light of all, according to this song of faith, reveals divine life through *creation*, through *incarnation*, and through *sanctification*. Life in him is a life of grace and truth, adoption as children of God, and a beholding of God’s glory. The eternal word himself is the instrument of the revelation of God’s glory throughout the material and spiritual cosmos, to the end that all creation may be disclosed in its true nature as a burning bush ablaze with the glory of the triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

But the doxological affirmations of faith and the hymnic language of St John’s Gospel should not lead us to overlook the reality of evil, the tragedy of sin, the realm of darkness, which resist God’s work. True life is not

recognized. The light is rejected. Although the light overcomes the darkness, God's victory is achieved only through the cost of the cross. Just as the hands and feet of the crucified Christ were pierced by spikes, so also God's creative, redemptive, and sanctifying activities in the world are attacked by demonic forces ever ready to destroy life. Grace and sin, truth and falsehood, love and hatred, so we are told by the evangelist of the fourth gospel, everywhere engage one another. The battleground is the human heart and will. Our choice is God's gift of abundant life or the terrible emptiness of death.

All things were made through him

What does it mean to confess God as Creator? By confessing that "all things were made through him" (John 1 : 3) we affirm that life is a gift of God and achieves its true purpose in closest link with him — whereas alienation from him is death. Life in its amazing multiplicity of forms, species, and levels is cohesive, sacred, and inviolate. Like the bread and wine of the eucharist, all of it can be consecrated to God and mirror the glory of God. By confessing God as the source of life and the Lord of life we recognize that all creation is a eucharist in his presence. It is to be received thankfully and responsibly as a common table of God's love, not as an unclaimed or unprotected treasure for hoarding and abuse.

St Kosmas Aitolos, an itinerant monk, priest, evangelist, and martyr, working among peasants in northwestern Greece during the late eighteenth century, expressed this truth about life as a gift of God with powerful simplicity:

God has many names, my brothers (and sisters). The principal name of God is love. He is a Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one nature, one glory, one kingdom, one God. We should first love God, my brothers (and sisters), because he gave us such a large earth to live in, so many thousands of people. And he gave us plants, fountains, rivers, oceans, fish, birds, night and day, sky, sun and moon... For whom did he create all of these if not for us? What did he owe us? Nothing. They are all his gifts... Now I ask you, my brothers (and sisters), tell me whom do you want, God or the devil?¹

In the perspective of St John's Gospel creation has simultaneously a christological and anthropological focus. The pre-existent Word is the creative power that upholds all things but the primary goal of his loving action is humanity: "In him was life, and the life was the light of humankind" (John 1 : 4).² For the Fourth Gospel the term *cosmos* signifies not so much nature but chiefly the world of human affairs, personal and corporate. In deep, often inarticulate ways we human beings most clearly sense that we do not possess life of ourselves. Rather we partake of the gift of life and seek fullness of life. The message of St John's Gospel is that God offers not

¹ N. M. Vapouris: *Father Kosmas, the Apostle of the Poor*, Brookline, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1977, pp. 19 and 91. I have combined two of Kosmas' statements in the above citation. See also the excellent study by P. S. Vallianos: "St Kosmas Aitolaos: Faith as Practical Commitment", in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 25, 2, 1980, pp. 172-186.

² The RSV reads "men" instead of "humankind". I am also aware of the alternate punctuation of vs. 3b-4a translated: "That which has been made was life in him". But this seems improper to me because the prologue's reference here is not to created but uncreated life, the word himself, who is the life and light of humankind.

mere life, that is, natural existence which is assumed, but true life, eternal life, a quality of life penetrated by his presence and will. The tragic problem of humanity is that we often seek to secure life in selfish ways which breed evil and corruption. Caught in our self-blindness, we refuse to trust in the Creator and obey his truth. Hence our hatred and violence, our injustice and oppression, our love of possessions and hedonism, all expressions of the will to live gone wild. Behind all this is refusal to believe, willful evil, insecurity, slavery to the survival instinct, and fear of death. The result is a cosmos ruled by demonic powers, darkness, and deadness. It is in this sense that, according to the Fourth Gospel, the term cosmos takes on the negative connotation signifying a world deliberately choosing to remain in darkness, a world set against its Creator, a world wholly “in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5 : 19). But the darkness does not overcome the light!

And the word became flesh

“And the word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1 : 14). What is meant by incarnation? The Gospel of St John, unlike those of St Matthew and St Luke, tells us nothing about the birth of Jesus. Although the fourth evangelist clearly affirms the *fact* of the word’s incarnation, his emphasis falls on the incarnate word’s *activity* in the world. For St John’s Gospel incarnation is above all the reality of the unique presence of God in the person, words, and works of Jesus of Nazareth. Through his historical ministry Christ discloses God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying power: “My Father is working still, and I am working” (John 5 : 17).

The incarnation may be interpreted in several ways. First, it is an expression of God’s unconditional love for humanity. The entire mission of the Son is prompted by divine love (John 3 : 16). “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him” (1 John 4 : 9). The incarnate word *became* flesh that the love with which the Father loved him may abide in us (John 17 : 26).

The incarnation is also a sharing, an embrace of life by life, a total identification of God with the object of his love. The word “pitched his tent” (*eskēnōsen*, John 1 : 14) among us that he might be “touched with our hands” (John 1 : 1). In his treatise *On the Incarnation* St Athanasius writes that the incarnate word moved among people, becoming an object of their senses, healing and teaching by word and deed.³ “To all who received him, ... he gave power to become children of God” (John 1 : 12), and to be his “friends” (John 15 : 14-15) and “brothers” (and sisters) (John 20 : 17). John, Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius, Chrysostom and others all interpret the incarnation in the light of a theology of sharing — the Son of God became man in order that human beings might become children of God by grace. In this light the unity of Christ’s full divinity and full humanity is the fundamental soteriological truth behind the trinitarian and christological teaching of the Church.

³ De Incar., iii, 14-15.

Finally the incarnation is redemption, the liberation of life, "life confronting and overcoming death", according to the formulation of the second sub-theme of this Sixth Assembly. The presence of the incarnate word in the world is an invasion of life into the realm of darkness. Especially Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, viewed as one movement of return to the Father,⁴ represent his "hour of glory", the hour when the powers of sin, satan, and death are decisively defeated, and new life takes hold in the world. Christ is Redeemer. "Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). An Orthodox icon of the resurrection depicts the risen Christ shattering the gates of hades, breaking to pieces the bonds of death, and raising up Adam and Eve to new life.

And from his fullness have we all received

The sufferings of Christ should not cause us to overlook his moments of joy with people. One of them was the marriage in Cana where Jesus turned the water into wine. The fourth evangelist alone reports this miracle and places it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Already much wine had been drunk. But Jesus made between one hundred and twenty and one hundred and eighty more gallons of new wine (John 2:6-9), a hyperbole. The joy of the marriage, the festivity of the wedding banquet, and the abundance of wine all symbolize the fullness of life brought to the world by Christ upon whom the Spirit descended and remained (John 1:32). The incarnate word was rich in "grace and truth" (John 1:14). The Law, *given* through Moses, was a gift of God. The only son bearing the glory of the father now brings "grace upon grace" (John 1:16). The pairing of "grace" and "truth" is well attested in the Jewish tradition (*hesed* and *'emet*). God was revealed to Moses on Sinai as a merciful and gracious God "*abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*".

Abundant life in Christ is life in community. "*We* have beheld his glory" (John 1:14). "And from his fullness have *we all* received" (John 1:16). The community consciousness is especially high in the farewell discourses of St John's Gospel (chaps. 13-17). Against the background of the washing of the disciples' feet and the Last Supper, Jesus shares with the disciples the bread of divine love and the intimacy of discipleship. He tells them about his mission in the world, their mutual relationship, and his abiding presence among them through the Spirit. He reveals to them his relationship to the Father and the Spirit; he prays to the Father that they may be sanctified in the truth and may share his glory; and he prepares them for mission. He is departing to the Father but he gives to them the Spirit to teach them all things. He also leaves with them his peace, assurance of victory, and commandments of love, mutual service, and unity. This is the risen Christ speaking to his church in all ages about who he is, who the disciples are, what they are to do in the world and how to do it. The Lord and his church are like the vine and the branches bearing fruit for the life of the world.

⁴ See R. Brown: *The Gospel According to John I-XII, The Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29, New York, Doubleday, 1966, p. 507.

An example of a disciple who heard his Master's voice is one Ivan Ilyich Sergiev, better known to Orthodox as St John of Kronstadt, an amazing witness to the abundant life of Christ lived in community. A pastor of a large cathedral, a man of the eucharist, a man of the scriptures, a man of prayer — truly a beloved disciple of the Lord — he washed with the waters of divine love the feet of thousands upon thousands of beggars and tramps who were concentrated in the port city of Kronstadt on the Baltic by government policy.⁵ He advertized in the *Kronstadt Herald*,⁶ pleaded with the public,⁷ mobilized people of education and means,⁸ and finally in 1882 the Home for Constructive Labour was opened, a phenomenal success. According to statistics by 1902, 7,281 men worked in its bag-and-hat shops, 259 children were enrolled in its free elementary school, and up to 800 meals per day were served in its public eating house. The home also featured job training in carpentry, shoe-making, and sewing, a library, a Sunday school, and even a summer camp boasting its own vegetable garden. Father John's biographer comments: "Such organized welfare, initiated by a parish priest, was at that time an unusual, a novel event... and it is the more exceptional, because his practical activity did not prevent him from remaining in a state of constant, profound prayer and spiritual contemplation."⁹ This "praying priest" as he was called, a splendid example of orthodox evangelical Christianity, who knew nothing about a neat distinction between the "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions of Christian life, most surely knew who was his life-source and the life-power of his work:

The Lord is everything to me: He is the strength of my heart and the light of my intellect. He inclines my heart to everything good; he strengthens it; he also gives me good thoughts; he is my rest and my joy; he is my faith, hope, and love; he is my food and drink, my raiment, my dwelling place.¹⁰

⁵ Bishop Alexander Semenoff-Tian-Chansky: *The Life of Father John of Kronstadt*, Crestwood, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, p. 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17. Father John perceived not only the private but also the social causes of poverty as, e.g. in this advertisement: "Who does not know of the swarms of beggars in Kronstadt? ... The reasons for their extreme poverty are many; for instance: poverty from birth; poverty due to orphanhood; poverty deriving from accidents such as fire and theft; poverty due to loss of work or incapacity to work owing to old age or illness; laziness; weakness for alcoholic drinks; and, mainly, lack of the equipment necessary to start work, such as decent clothing, tools or instruments."

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18, quoting Father John: "Do not be afraid of the immensity of such an enterprise; God will help us in a good work and with God's help everything which is needful will be forthcoming."

⁸ *Ibid.*, quoting Father John: "'The strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak' (Rom. 15: 1). Therefore in the presence of such diverse potentialities in our Kronstadt society, with all its talents, its great numbers of educated, active and often wealthy people, it would be a sin before God and men to leave so many of our members alienated, isolated and deprived of their share of prosperity."

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21. For the statistics see pp. 19-21.

¹⁰ *My Life in Christ: Extracts from the Diary of Saint John of Kronstadt*, Part I, transl. E. E. Goulaeff and reprinted by Archmandrite Panteleimon, Jordanville, Holy Trinity Monastery, 1977, p. 225. A thematic selection of St John's diary extracts has been compiled by W. Jardine Grisbrooke, *Spiritual Counsels of Father John of Kronstadt*, Westminster, Clarke, 1966, and recently reprinted by St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982.

The only Son from the Father

While the prologue as well as the entire content of St John's Gospel extol the incarnate word's significance for the world as the creative, redeeming, and sanctifying presence of the triune God, the limelight is cast on the grandeur of the person of Christ himself whose glory is "glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). Christ does not merely *teach* about or *transmit* life, light, and truth; he *is* also all these. By virtue of his unique relationship to God the Father (1:1, 18) the incarnate word reveals: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The whole Gospel of St John was written to the end that all may believe that Jesus is the Christ and that believing they may have life in his name (John 20:31).

How can this absolute claim that Christ is not *a* but *the* life of the world be properly interpreted in a contemporary world of religious and ideological pluralism, a world shrunk to the extent that a satellite can travel around it in a few hours? We must freely admit that this claim, as other transcendent claims by other religions, has from the early days of Christianity led Christians to sinful patterns of triumphalism, intolerance, and persecution unworthy of Christ who preached love of enemies and forgave his crucifiers from the cross. We need to repent of our sins before the world and seek in the mystery of the cross to find ways of lifting up Christ as an invitation of faith, love, and freedom, an invitation which must not be abused either for selfish ends or to force anyone's conscience.

Woe to those who would lay claim to Christ, the incarnate Love of God, that they may breed self-righteousness and intolerance, prejudice and polemics, injustice and oppression, hiding all manner of sin and ignorance.

That Christ is the life of the world is above all a call to Christians themselves for radical repentance, spiritual renewal, urgency on the walk towards unity, common witness, prophetic action, being ready to die for others in Christ's name. Are we willing to die for others? That is the key question. We ourselves then become, and only then, convincing in our confession of Christ as the life of the world. Christ came not to judge the world but to save it. In the words of St Dimitrii of Rostov, let us confess Christ as our Life, Light, and Lord, and pray to him to cleanse us from sin and to energize us for this task:

Come, our Light, and illumine our darkness.
 Come, our Life, and revive us from death.
 Come, our Physician, and heal our wounds.
 Come, Flame of divine love, and burn up the thorns of our sins, kindling our hearts with the flame of your love.
 Come, our King, sit upon the throne of our hearts and reign there.
 For you alone are our King and our Lord.¹¹

¹¹ K. Ware: *The Orthodox Way*, St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1979, p. 21-22. I have rendered the prayer in the plural.

2. The hour comes, and it is now

Allan Boesak

Jesus Christ the life of the world! These are words that speak of joy, of meaning, of hope. For some, they may even speak of triumph and victory. These are words that have a ring of certainty in them. Yet, in the uncertain world of suffering, oppression and death, what do they mean? The realities of the world in which we live suggest the cold grip of death rather than the freedom of life.

Violence, greed and the demonic distortion of human values continue to destroy God's world and his people. Economic exploitation is escalating rather than abating and economic injustice is still the dominant reality in the relationships between rich and poor countries. Racism is as rampant as ever, not only in South Africa, but also in other parts of the world. In its alliances with national security ideologies it has acquired a new cloak of respectability and has become even more pervasive. In South Africa apartheid and injustice still reign supreme. Inequality is still sanctified by law and racial superiority is still justified by theology. Today, with the blatant support of so many Western governments, apartheid seems stronger than ever and the dream of justice and human dignity for South Africa's black people more remote than ever.

In our world, it is not the joyful, hopeful sound of the word of life that is being heard. No, that word is drowned by the ugly sound of gunfire, by the screams of our children and the endless cry of the powerless: "How long, Lord?"

In too many places too many children die of hunger and too many people just disappear because they dare to stand up for justice and human rights. Too many are swept away by the tides of war and too many are tortured in dungeons of death. In too many eyes the years of endless struggle have extinguished the fires of hope and joy and too many bodies are bowed down by the weight of that peculiarly repugnant death called despair. Too many young people believe that their youth and their future are already powdered to dust by the threat of nuclear destruction. And even in the face of all of this, too many in the Christian church remain silent. We have not yet understood that every act of inhumanity, every unjust law, every untimely death, every utterance of faith in weapons of mass destruction, every justification of violence and oppression is a sacrifice on the altar of the false gods of death; it is a denial of the Lord of life.

No, for millions of people it is true: we are not uplifted by the word of life, we are crushed by the litany of death.

Yet the gospel affirms: Jesus Christ is the life of the world. Dare we believe this? Can we believe this without making of our faith a narrow, spiritual escapism? Can we avoid the cynicism of "reality"? Can we find a

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way to live with that painful dilemma: "Lord, I believe, please help my unbelief!" And even more painful: can we accept the reality of hope and the call to battle that lie in this affirmation? In other words, is the joyous affirmation, this confession that Jesus Christ is the life of the world, really meant for the millions who suffer and die, who are oppressed and who live without hope in the world today? While discussing this theme with a group in my congregation, a woman said quietly, almost despairingly: "It seems you have to be white and rich to believe this."

Good News for the weak

But there are two things we must remember when talking about this. First, in the gospel this affirmation is never a triumphalistic war-cry. It is never a slogan built on might and power. It is a confession in the midst of weakness, suffering and death. It is the quiet, subversive piety which the Christian church cannot do without. Second, we must be reminded that in the Bible this affirmation is given to people who in their situation *were* the poor, oppressed and the weak. They were the people who lived on the underside of history. And it is they who are called upon to confirm this truth: Jesus Christ is the life of the world.

In the gospel of John, chapter 4, the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a good illustration of this truth. She is the paradigm *par excellence* of the despised, the weak and the oppressed, just like the children are elsewhere in the gospel. She becomes the very example of the dejected people of this world. First of all, she is a woman, with all that that means in the society of her day. Notice how John makes a point of stating the disciples' astonishment that Jesus was in discussion with a woman. She is also a Samaritan, and therefore despised and rejected by the Jews. Her religion is considered inferior and in her own community she is an outcast because of her way of life. This is probably the reason why she goes to that well alone, at a most unusual hour of the day. But it is precisely to her that Jesus speaks of these unfathomable things: the life-giving waters, and the waters of life.

Likewise, the Revelation of John is written to a weak, scattered underground church, suffering severely under the persecution of a ruthless tyrant. They were people who had no recourse, no protection under the law, no "connections" in high and powerful places, no political or economic power. Their lives were cheap. They were completely and utterly surrendered to the mercy of a man who did not know the meaning of the word, whom John could only describe with the telling title: "beast". From a purely human point of view, they had not a chance in the world, there was precious little upon which they could build their hopes for the future. But like the Samaritan woman, *they* are the ones who hear the message and to whom this is proclaimed: "I am the first and the last and the living One. . ." They knew with a certainty not born of earthly power: Jesus Christ, not the Caesar, in spite of all *his* power, is the life of the world. The claims of divinity, of immortality, of omniscience and power are the lies, the half-truths, the propaganda without which no tyrant can survive. But the truth stands: Jesus Christ is the life of the world, and He is indeed Lord of life.

The church understood this confession not only as comfort in times of trial and darkness, but as essential part of that basic, subversive confession: Jesus Christ is Lord. In this way it became not only comfort to the persecuted and oppressed church, but also a ringing protest against the arrogance of earthly potentates who wanted so desperately to create the impression that *they* decided over the life and death of the people of God. And the church knew this to be the truth, not only for the life hereafter, but the truth for the very life and the very world in which they struggled to believe, to be faithful, to be obedient. To understand that is to understand the power, nay more, to experience the power of the life-giving word. It is to drink of the life-giving and living waters even while facing suffering, destruction and death. It is to understand and experience what it means to worship the living one in spirit and in truth. It is not confined to certain moments only. This is a worship which encompasses all of our life, so that every prayer for liberation, every act for the sake of human dignity, every commitment in the struggle for true human freedom, every protest against the sinful realities of this world, becomes an offering to the living One for the sake of his kingdom.

Jesus says: "The hour comes, and it is now..." Here the present and the future coincide. The moment of the hesitant, yet faithful human response and the moment of the favour of the Lord come together. It may seem as if for the moment the dictators of this world, the powerful and the mighty have full control over this world. Their arrogance seems to have no bounds. Their power seems unchecked. But the church knows: Jesus Christ is lord of history, He is lord of life, and his truth shall have the final word.

As Christians in South Africa we begin to understand that for us God's moment is brought together with our present reality and that the church is called to an extraordinary courageous witness for the sake of the gospel. So we hear Bishop Desmond Tutu, the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, saying to the South African Minister of Law and Order: "Mr Minister, we must remind you that you are not God. You are just a man. And one day your name shall merely be a faint scribble on the pages of history, while the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, shall live forever..."

The Christian church can take this stand, not because it possesses earthly power, nor because it has "control" over the situation. Over against the structures of political, economic and military power who seek to rule this world the church remains weak and in a sense defenceless. But it takes this stand because it refuses to believe that the powers of oppression, death and destruction have the last word. Even while facing these powers the church continues to believe that Jesus Christ is lord and therefore the life of the world. And it is this faith in the living One, this refusal to bow down to the false gods of death, that is the strength of the church.

But this affirmation has another ramification. Jesus Christ is the life of the *world*. His concern is not only for the church but for the world. In his life, death and resurrection lies not only the future of the church, but the future of the world. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul is persistent in proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord of the church and of the cosmos. Therefore,

his being our peace has consequences not only for the church but also for the world. Therefore, the church must proclaim, clearly and unequivocally, that Jesus Christ came to give meaningful life to the world, so that all of human history, all human activity can be renewed and liberated from death and destruction.

The life of the world, the destruction of this world, the future of this world, is therefore the concern of the church. We have a responsibility for this world, for it is God's world. And if this world is threatened by the evils of militarism, materialism, greed, racism, it is very much the concern of the church. It is the church which has heard the words: "Today I am giving you a choice between good and evil, between life and death... choose life!" It is the church who has heard the words: "I have come so that they may have life, and that abundantly..." And because we have heard this, and because we confess Jesus Christ as the life of the world, we dare not be silent.

Speaking out on peace and justice

This Assembly must speak out. We must confess, humbly but without any hesitation, our faith in Jesus Christ, the life of the world. We must, humbly but without any hesitation, renew our commitment to Jesus Christ, the life of the world. And this faith, this commitment, must be the basis of our action on the issues of peace, justice and human liberation. We must not hesitate to address ourselves to the question of peace and to the possibility of total nuclear destruction. We must be clear: the nuclear arms race, the employment of God-given human talents and possibilities for the creation of ever more refined weapons of mass destruction, and the call to put our faith in these weapons so as to secure our peace, is not simply a temporary madness, it is essentially sinful and contrary to the purposes of God for this world and for the people of his heart.

I am not persuaded that the issue of peace is simply one of fashion, a fad that will go away tomorrow. I do not agree with those who believe that this issue is simply one of political and military calculations, so that the church should withdraw from the debate and let the problems be solved by the politicians and the military strategists. I remain convinced that the issue of peace, as it faces us today, lies at the very heart of the gospel.

But there is something else I must say about this. When the World Alliance of Reformed Churches met in Ottawa last August, we spent considerable time discussing a statement on peace. During the debate, a delegate from Africa made a remark that very poignantly raised some of the tensions surrounding this issue in the ecumenical movement today. He said: "In this document, the word 'nuclear' is used a number of times, but I don't ever see the word 'hunger'. In my village, the people will not understand the word 'nuclear', but they know everything about hunger and poverty."

What he was really talking about was the concern of many Christians in the third world that the issue of peace will be separated from the issue of justice, making of peace primarily a North-Atlantic concern. This should not happen; first of all, because ideologies of militarism and national security are international in character and cause deprivation and the con-

tinuation of injustice everywhere, but especially in the so-called “third world” countries. But secondly, and more importantly, in the Bible peace and justice are never separated. Peace is never simply the absence of war, it is the active presence of justice. It has to do with human fulfilment, with liberation, with wholeness, with a meaningful life and wellbeing, not only for the individual, but for the community as a whole. And the prophet Isaiah speaks of peace as the offspring of justice.

So it may be true that the issues of justice, racism, hunger and poverty are largely unresolved issues for the ecumenical movement. It may be true that these issues present the churches with painful dilemmas, but it cannot be true that we will be willing to use the issue of peace to avoid those dilemmas. One cannot use the gospel to escape from the demands of the gospel. And one cannot use the issue of peace to escape from the unresolved issues of injustice, poverty, hunger and racism. If we do this we will make of our concern for peace an ideology of oppression which in the end will be used to justify injustice.

Separating truth from falsehood

But there is one last point we have to make. Jesus Christ is the life of the world because he reveals the truth about himself, the church, humankind and the world. He is the Messiah, the chosen one of God who proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord. In him is the fulfilment of the promises of Yahweh. He is the Servant of the Lord who shall not cease his struggle until justice shall triumph on the earth (Isa. 42 : 1-3; Matt. 12 : 17-21). In him shall the nations place their hope.

Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection, is himself the guarantee of life, peace and human dignity. He is the Messiah who struggles and suffers with his people. And yet, he is the victor. He is king in his suffering, not in spite of it. There is therefore an inseparable link between Pontius Pilate’s “Ecce homo!” and his “There is your king!” (John 19 : 4, 19). So it is that the Book of Revelation speaks of Jesus both as the lamb that was slaughtered and as the rider on the white horse. The one who died is the one who lives forever. The suffering servant of the word is the ruler of the kings of the earth. The one who was willing to give up his life is Jesus the Messiah, the life of the world.

This is the truth that is revealed to the church even as we speak the words: Jesus Christ is the life of the world. The Revelation of John reminds us of the victory of the saints. But again, it is not a victory brought about by earthly powers. “They won the victory over (Satan) by the blood of the lamb, and by the truth they proclaimed, and because they did not love their life unto death” (Rev. 12 : 11). This truth is the basis upon which the church stands. It is the essence of the witness of the church in the world. It is the essence of the confession: Jesus Christ is the life of the world. The church can only say this, if we are willing to give our life for the sake of the world. And we can only say this if we are willing to accept that the survival of the church is secondary to the survival of the world. We can only say this if we truly believe that there are some things so dear, some things so precious,

some things so eternally true that they are worth dying for. And the truth that Jesus Christ is the life of the world is worth giving our life for.

The truth that the Messiah reveals is contrary to the lies, the propaganda, the idolatrous, the untrustworthy in the world. His truth is the truth that holds the freedom and the life of the world. And this we are called to proclaim. And so as we begin these two weeks together as the assembled churches of the world, let us affirm this truth, and let us believe:

— It is not true that this world and its people are doomed to die and be lost —

This is true: For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

— It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction —

This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

— It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction have come to stay forever —

This is true: For unto us a child is born, and unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God, the Everlasting father, the prince of peace.

— It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world —

This is true: To me is given all authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even unto the end of the world.

— It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the church, before we can do anything:

This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall have dreams...

— It is not true that our dreams for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity, of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history —

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth...

So let us use these two weeks to dream, let us use these two weeks to prophesy; let us use these two weeks to see visions of love, and peace and justice. Let us use these two weeks to affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: *Jesus Christ — the life of the world.*

3. Life in its fullness

Dorothee Sölle

Dear Sisters and Brothers, I speak to you as a woman from one of the wealthiest countries in the world; a country whose history is tainted with bloodshed and the stench of gas that some of us who are Germans have not been able to forget; a country that today has the world's greatest concentration of nuclear weapons lying at the ready. I would like to tell you a little about the fears and anxieties that reign in anger, in criticism and in sorrow. The grief I feel at my own country, the friction that sets me at odds with my own society is not a whim on my part or because I have nothing better to do. It springs from my belief in the life of the world as I find it in the poor man from Nazareth who had neither wealth nor weapons. This man, a poor man, portrays the life of the world for us to see and points us towards the ground of our being, to God. Christ is God's exegesis, the exposition who made him known to us (John 1 : 18).

I do not intend any kind of religious imperialism in saying this, as though there could be no other expositions of God in other religions; I mean it rather in the sense of unconditional commitment to become fully involved with this Jesus Christ if we seek the life of the world and not death.

Christ came into the world that all may have life "and have it in all its fullness" or, as it can also be translated, "that they may live and find in abundance all that they need" (John 10 : 10). What is this "life in all its fullness"? Where does it take place? Who lives it? Looking at our world I see two ways in which life is being destroyed: *outward poverty and inward emptiness*.

Outward poverty

For a good two-thirds of the human family there is no such thing as "life in all its fullness" because they are impoverished, living on the edge of death in stark, economically conditioned poverty. They are hungry, they have no shelter, no shoes, no medicine for their children, no clean water to drink, no work — and they see no way of getting their oppressors off their backs. Trade agreements and international relations are dictated by the rich first world and imposed on the poor, plunging them daily deeper into destitution. The mere struggle for survival destroys the fullness of life, the shalom of God, of which the Bible speaks: Where people need not be anxious about their daily food, where they are healthy, where they are not threatened by their enemies and can enjoy a long life in the bosom of their family and community. "Long life is in her right hand, in her left hand are riches and honours", as we read in Proverbs 3 : 16. Poverty destroys this life which is promised to all of us.

• Prof. SÖLLE, a native of Germany, teaches at Union Theological Seminary, New York, USA. This address was one of the presentations on "Life in all its fullness", a sub-theme of the WCC's Sixth Assembly, held in Vancouver 24 July-10 August 1983. Translation from the German by the Language Service of the WCC.

I would like here to read you a letter from a Brazilian woman, which she dictated to a nun because she herself cannot read or write.

My name is Severina, I come from the north-east. Up there in my country two of my babies died because I had no milk. One day in my village I saw forty-two little coffins being carried to the cemetery. My sister-in-law who was very poor had seventeen children: three of them lived, all the others died before they were four. Of the three who lived two are not normal. I was with her for the births and sometimes there wasn't even a clean piece of sheet to wrap the baby in. That's what happens in lots of families, thousands even — ten or fifteen children are born and five or six of the ten die. And there are priests who tell us, "If you have seven children who die as infants you will be blessed: a crown of angels awaits you in heaven". But who really knows what it means for a woman to carry a child for nine months, weeping for the first three of them because she knows she will never see her baby grow up — and that perhaps ten times or more. Is she to love the child only to see it die of starvation within four months? Can that really be what they mean when they speak about "human dignity"? Of course, I see from the gospel that Claudia and Vera often read to me that Christ loved poverty; but not human suffering, he didn't put up with that.

There's a difference between being poor and having nothing to give your baby except sweetened water, and you give her the water and you know she's going to die.

Christ came into the world so that all might have life "in all its fullness" but the absolute impoverishment which is a crime in a technologically developed world is destroying people physically, spiritually, mentally and also religiously because it poisons hope and makes a mockery of faith by turning it into helpless apathy. What comes between Christ and the world's impoverished peoples is exploitation, the sin of the rich who are seeking to destroy Christ's promise. Speaking of "fullness of life" Christ says in John's Gospel: "I am the door; anyone who comes into the fold through me shall be safe. He shall go in and out and find pasturage. The thief comes only to steal, to kill, to destroy; I have come that human beings may have life, and may have it in all its fullness" (John 10: 9-10).

Christ and "the thief" stand at opposite extremes from one another. The thief comes to plunder the poor so they will die. Christ came to bring fullness of life. But it would be a childish kind of Christianity that simply sat back and waited to see whether it was the thief or Christ who came. We are involved in both these undertakings, the plundering and the fullness of life. Either we participate in Christ's mission, or we participate in the thief's plans for the world. As long as we remain merely victims or merely spectators in this struggle for justice, we are supporting the thief and his crimes. By joining in the struggle for a world of greater justice, on the other hand, we are taking part in the plan for creation of the God who has given us this earth in trust that all may have life in fullness.

Inward emptiness

Life in all its fullness is an impossibility when one is forced to live in absolute poverty. But even in the wealthy first world there is very little fulfilled life to be found, only an ever-growing inner emptiness. What comes between Christ and the middle-classes of the first world is not material poverty but spiritual emptiness. The meaninglessness of life perceived by

many sensitive individuals ever since the beginning of industrial development has now become a widespread experience among the mass of people in the first world: nothing delights them, nothing moves them deeply, their relationships are superficial and interchangeable, their hopes and dreams go no further than their next holiday trip. For the majority, work is unsatisfying, pointless, boring. God created us as men and women with a capacity for working and loving. We participate in creation in our work and in our sexuality in the widest sense of the word.

Fullness of life means amongst other things becoming a worker and a lover. For most people in the first world, however, life is more like a long death lingering over many years. It is pain-free: there are pills and to spare, after all; it is feeling-free: "Don't be so emotional" is an expression of strong disapproval in our language; it is without grace because life is seen as self-achieved and not as a gift from the Creator. It is life without a soul lived in a world which calculates everything in terms of what it is worth; nothing is beautiful and a source of happiness for its own sake, the only thing that counts is what you can get for it. We are empty and at the same time surfeited with superfluous goods and products. There is an odd relationship between the many objects we possess and consume and the emptiness of our real existence. While Christ came that we might have fullness of life, capitalism came to turn everything into money. That is the long death that looks out at us from so many empty faces. Just think for a moment of a traffic jam, everyone sitting alone inside their own tin can, slowly and aggressively edging their way forward. Frustration and hatred of the people in front and the people behind is the normal reaction. This is an image of life in its emptiness in the rich world.

In the gospel we read the story of the rich young man who seemed to possess fullness of life in the form of many possessions, yet is overcome by the inner emptiness of his life. Life has treated him kindly. He has what he needs and much more besides. But his questions go beyond having and being satisfied in this material sense. What shall I do with my life? What must I do to inherit eternal life? How can I make my life more radical, less ambiguous, less fragmented, less of a compromise? What can I do to escape from the half-heartedness of my existence?

Not long ago I saw a letter which might have come from the rich young man's brother, an ordinary member of the white middle-class in Europe. He wrote:

I am thirty-five, a civil servant with a good position, married. We have two children. So far our marriage has been happy. The children are fine. I have everything I need, a secure well-paid job, there's nothing wrong at home. But for all that, recently I haven't been feeling right. I've been feeling more and more that my life is empty. Something is missing, but I don't know what. Sometimes I think I should drop everything and just take off. But I haven't the strength for that. You can't just throw away everything you've worked for.

His letter ends with the question, "What shall I do?"

I see these two faces before me, the civil servant from West Germany and the rich young man in the New Testament. They have all they need, yet something is missing. They are not the type of the hardheaded successful

male, they are not brutal but if anything rather soft. They have not earned their position and their wealth by fighting and stealing, by maligning others or cheating and exploiting them. They probably look after their parents and do not beat their wives. They are polite and disinclined to radicalism of any kind. Both want to do something with their lives, they want to win eternal life. They want to be whole, they want to live unfragmented lives and reflect something of the glory of fullness. But their lives have no glory to reflect. They do not radiate brightness. There is only emptiness and, behind it, the long death.

The evangelist Mark tells us that Jesus looked upon the rich young man and loved him (Mark 10:21). Jesus wants to draw him, and all of us, into fuller life than we have known before. This rich young man, too, could enter into the fullness of life, he is even aware that something is lacking, that he can expect more of life. But there is something radically wrong with his notion of eternal life for he thinks: I have everything, I have obeyed all the rules, there is only one thing missing and that is: the meaning of life, fulfilment. If I can only have that as well everything will be fine.

Jesus turns this expectation upside down: you do not have too little, you have too much. "Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven, and come, follow me" (Mark 10:21).

Many middle-class people today are searching for a new spirituality. They have a training and a profession, education and a secure income, family and friends but they are looking for something more — religious fulfilment, meaning in life, food for the soul, consolation; all this on top of material security, a religious-added value, as it were, for people who are already over-privileged. They are seeking spiritual fullness of life in addition to material fullness, blessing from above in addition to their wealth.

But Jesus rebuffs this pious middle-class hope. Fullness of life does not come when you already have everything. We first have to empty ourselves to receive God's fullness. Give away what you have, give it to the poor, then you will have found what you are looking for. The story of the rich young man ends in sorrow; sorrow in the heart of the rich young man, for he is very rich — and he goes away. Perhaps he will become depressive, perhaps he will start drinking, perhaps he will cause an automobile accident. He would not let himself be drawn into more life, fullness of life, sharing of life.

In many towns in West Germany you will see painted on walls the English words "NO FUTURE". The people who feel like this are young and energetic; yet they cannot imagine bringing a child into this world, they have stopped planting trees. Life in its fullness, the promise of Christ, produces only a weary smile. Sometimes their sorrow is turned outwards, in aggressiveness, often it is turned inwards, in depression. Life is empty.

Jesus, too, in our story goes sorrowfully on his way. "How hard it will be for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23). Fullness of life, the kingdom of God, eternal life, all are destroyed by wealth of possessions, exploitation, injustice. But the rich young man does not know this. He is filled with hopeless sorrow and sorrowful hopelessness. Why are so many people in the rich world so empty? With a superfluity of things life

itself becomes superfluous. Among the younger generation in particular today there is a strong and growing desire to break away from dependence on too many possessions. Henry David Thoreau said: "The possibilities of life diminish as so-called 'means' increase. The best thing a rich man can do to preserve his humanity is to realize the dreams he cherished when he was poor." Economics alone cannot explain it: they have everything, people say, what more do they want! I doubt, too, whether individual psychology, that opium of the middle-classes, can offer much explanation here. I do not see that we need to know the rich young man's parents and analyze their relationship with their son before we can understand his history with God. What I think we need in fact, if we are to understand the empty and meaningless life of the rich, is knowledge of God, theology.

The ground of our life

God is the ground of our life. It was he who breathed the breath of life into humankind (Gen. 2 : 7). If we hide ourselves from God behind the barrier of our many possessions so that God cannot touch us, then we die — the prolonged death of the middle-classes which is now also the death of the elites of third world countries. Wealth acts as a wall more invincible by far than the famous walls of Jericho. We set ourselves apart, we make ourselves untouchable, and our wall is sound-proof so that we cannot hear the cries of the poor and oppressed. Apartheid is not just a political system in an African country. It is a certain way of thinking, feeling and living without being conscious of what is happening around us. There is a way of doing theology in which the poor and economically exploited are never seen or heard — and that is apartheid theology. I am speaking here about my own social class, but I would also want to include all those from other economic situations who pursue the same ideals even though they may not yet have achieved them. Dear sisters and brothers from the third and second worlds, I beg of you: Do not follow our example! Claim back what we have stolen from you, but do not follow us. Otherwise, like the rich young man, you will have sorrowfully to bid farewell to Christ. Do not pursue the idea of "fullness of life" as we have developed it in the Western world. It is a delusion. It separates us from God, it makes us rich... and dead.

The spiritual emptiness of the rich is a result of the economic injustice on which they capitalize. We have chosen a system based on money and violence. The rich young man will have bouts of depression. He cannot change his life, he can only make it secure. And he will have to keep making it more and more secure to prevent anything being taken away from him. So he stockpiles weapons. The mild depression prevailing in so many European and North American churches is tantamount in practice to acquiescence in militarism. They have no hope because they trust in the deadly peace of the arms advocates. Money and violence go together. Those who make money their God are bound to make national security their state ideology and armaments a political priority.

Some Christians in our countries are saying: What is so bad about safeguarding our security with arms? We are not actually going to use the

bomb, just the threat of it. In reality, however, the bomb destroys the fullness of life Christ has promised to us. It destroys the life of the poor in the material sense, the life of the rich in the spiritual sense. It has become lodged inside us. It has taken possession of us. We will never know fullness of life while we live under the bomb which has become the most potent symbol in our world, the thing our politicians research and pay for, love and fear above all else. In other words, it has become their God.

The wealth of the wealthy lies not just in their possessions but also, perhaps more so, in their power to destroy. The world I live in is rich beyond measure in death and ever more sophisticated means of killing. The bombs lying stored ready for use beneath the earth's surface and under the oceans in submarines, the quantities of explosives intended for every human being on earth are, I believe, targeted on God. The meaning of the arms race is this: God is to be eliminated from the earth once and for all. Even the bombs that have not yet been used are directed against God. Militarism is humanity's supreme effort of get rid of God once and for all, to undo creation and prevent redemption leading to fullness of life.

If it is true that a superfluity of things makes life superfluous, then the way to change is to become poorer. "Sell what you have", Jesus tells the rich middle-class young man, "and give it to the poor". We cannot fill our inner emptiness with God at no cost to ourselves by some kind of cheap spirituality. We first have to empty ourselves outwardly of all that overfills us. Becoming empty for God means emptying ourselves and relinquishing or reducing all the possessions of our world: money and violence. To become poorer and rely less and less on violence, that is the change of heart which leads to fullness of life.

New values and attitudes

Jesus tried to bring the rich young man to break with his own world, with its attitudes and values, and his own privileged social class. Christ faces us with the same question: How long will you continue to go along with a world order which is based on exploitation and oppression? How long will you continue to benefit from and connive at the system which is dominated by "the thief who comes to steal, to kill, to destroy"? As far as my country is concerned, this question is a little easier to answer today than it was even three years ago.

To be honest, I have to admit that I would never have expected our traditional churches, which I have often felt to be a grave in which Christ is buried, to generate so much liberation and life. But God creates sons and daughters for himself from stones to be a ferment for peace, so why not from congregations as well? A few years ago many of the most thoughtful people I know longed to be in the third world because there the struggles are more clear-cut, fronts more clearly defined, hopes more immediate. "I wish I were in Nicaragua," one student wrote to me, "life in Christ would be possible there." To many of us it seemed that we could only find Christ at the side of the poor and not in our first world context. I suspect things have changed somewhat in this respect now. We do not live in El Salvador, but we do live under the domination of NATO. In its planning offices deci-

sions are taken that affect our lives and the lives of other peoples. Sacrifices are being offered there to false gods and that is where our struggles must lie. Our historical task is to fight for peace and against militarism. This is how we can participate in the third world's struggle for liberation. No-one who feels a bond with the poor has any reason to despair today nor to engage in senseless acts of destruction and self-destruction. Since the latest arms build-up began with a view to perpetuating the reign of terror, we know exactly where our El Salvador lies. Our Vietnam. Our Soweto. Our liberation struggle. Our conversion away from money and violence to justice and peace. Speaking of fullness of life, Paul also says, "and because there is no veil over the face, we all reflect as in a mirror the splendour of the Lord; thus we are transfigured into his likeness..." (2 Cor. 3 : 18). This splendour shines out of the faces of those who have been converted to peace and justice.

Many Christians believe freedom from violence will only be possible in the kingdom of God, while on earth war and poverty are inevitable. People who adopt this view, however, are separating God from his kingdom and, like the rich young man, seeking an eternal life devoid of justice and a fullness of life devoid of love, which is an absurdity. Human richness lies in a person's relationships with others, in his or her being for others. Far from being decreased by sharing with others, the fullness of life increases as miraculously as the five loaves and two fishes. Christ sets us free from life-consuming poverty and life-sapping inner emptiness, he makes us free to enter into a new community in which we need no longer do violence to one another but can make one another happy. We have become one with the living love and do not need to postpone eternal life to another age.

The richness of life

There is a passage in the Prophet Isaiah which speaks of the fullness of life, of its beauty and truth:

Is not this what I require of you as a fast:
to loose the fetters of injustice,
to untie the knots of the yoke,
to snap every yoke
and set free those who have been crushed?

Is it not sharing your food with the hungry,
taking the homeless poor into your house,
clothing the naked when you meet them
and never evading a duty to your kinsfolk?

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn and soon
you will grow healthy like a wound newly healed;
your own righteousness shall be your vanguard
and the glory of the Lord your rearguard.

....

You shall be called Rebuilder of broken walls,
Restorer of houses in ruins. (Isa. 58 : 6-12)

The passage speaks of the richness of life. Do not hold yourself in reserve, it tells us. Your fullness will grow with your extravagance. The richness of which this text speaks is the richness of being a human person,

not the richness of having things. The richness of having is preserved in possessions, status, privileges. It is wealth gained by making others poor. The rich person of whom Isaiah speaks, who shares her food with the hungry and talks to those who are depressed, is not rich through having but rich in human relations. Such a woman has many friends. This does not mean an inward richness that enables her simply to overlook outward poverty and lack of freedom. The rich person described by Isaiah is aware of the injustice, the subjugation and destruction of life in society, but she is not prepared to come to terms with it. Her life has direction, a clear line, and its aim is that all should receive a name. Richness means gaining brothers and sisters. Richness in this sense is to be found in a tiny country like Nicaragua where fullness has grown out of want. Isaiah is not addressing people who simply receive orders and carry out assigned tasks. He is speaking to the forceful, rich human being who has been so much maligned and belittled in the Christian tradition. The Prophet counts on such people, and entices them to enter into the beauty of a real, fulfilled life.

It is a beautiful gospel — and our text is pure gospel. It promises a life free of contempt of others, and of myself, a life free of cynicism and fear, a rich life in which every hour is valuable. “Then shall your light break forth like the dawn!” New skin will grow quickly to heal your wounds. Even in the banality of everyday life, in the arid barrenness of our petrified environment “your soul will be satisfied”. Things will not be meaningless. “Your dusk will be like noonday.”

When I hear this text I am not faced with new demands — the demands are old and familiar — but I do find a tempting vision of life in its fullness. This is how we can live, this is what I want to be like. This is how I want people to think of me, this is the name I want to be called. When I hear this text, I am reminded afresh that we are strong, we can achieve something, we are not expendable. There is no call for us to sing all year round that our strength is to no avail. We have a new hymn: “Then your light will rise like dawn out of darkness, you will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.” This is how it should be, this is how it will be. I shall have a name, I shall be answered, I shall no longer be a helpless, anxious being. The truth of the world, the meaning of life will be clearly revealed. “Here I am”, says the Lord in this text, not far away in some other place, not in some distant future or past with happier peoples, but here and now. If you do not stand apart from your brothers and sisters, then “your light will rise like dawn out of darkness”.

Christianity says nothing that we cannot also hear elsewhere. “If you cease to pervert justice...” But it also holds out a final promise: Nothing is without meaning.

Teresa of Avila said: The way to heaven *is* itself heaven. However deep the darkness may be along the way, you are never alone. If you let yourself be carried by love, your strength will be increased. Your wealth will grow the more you share. Wherever you allow love to carry you, love, the fullness of life, is with you.

Testimonies

The main presentations on the Sixth Assembly theme and its sub-themes were accompanied by a number of brief presentations testifying to the way in which Jesus Christ is present and alive in concrete situations in different parts of the world. The following are abbreviated versions of some of those testimonies.

1. Life in the midst of death

Frieda Haddad

It was early on Easter morning towards the end of matins:

It is the day of the Resurrection, let us be illumined by the Feast; let us embrace one another; let us call even those who hate us, our brothers. Let us forgive everything for the sake of the Resurrection, and so let us cry, "Christ is risen from the dead, He has trampled down death by death and has given Life to those who lay in the tombs".

As the choir reached this particular part of the responsive hymn that precedes the divine liturgy, the thundering of "grade" shells shook the building. Glimpses of the past eight years of war must have flitted in all minds for there was a hushed murmur in the congregation.

The smell of burning sulfur all over the besieged city, the scorching summer heat in the shelter with only one gallon of drinking water for about eighty people, the sound of the approaching Israeli planes, then the shelling for hours and hours. A whole city driven underground, infants crying and "eating" powdered milk for water was scarce and could not be wasted on the luxury of feeding-bottles. As days, weeks and months went by, a whole shelter-culture developed. People had their preferred corners, but at every new air-raid, as the shelter filled in, there was at least one more empty seat, one more empty bunk-bed: the grocer had been hit by a stray bullet, or the neighbour's daughter had been blown to pieces by the huge car explosion down the street that had shattered all doors and windows around the block. Two whole buildings had been burnt to the ground. The next morning the Red Cross and civil service volunteers had combed the street looking for remains of dismembered bodies. They found a child's shoe, a leg and a hand still clutching a burnt doll. They gathered them up in a white bed-sheet. And the neighbourhood assembled for a last farewell to Dania, a delightful little girl of eight with curly blond hair.

• Ms HADDAD is a lecturer in pastoral theology and Christian education at the Greek Orthodox Theological Institute, Balamand, Lebanon.

Dania came from a Muslim family. A few weeks before the explosion she had accompanied a friend from across the street to church. And then she asked the priest whether she could come with Rula to Sunday school. The priest was at a loss as to what to say. But one day Dania came back accompanied by her father who insisted that the two girls come together. So Dania joined Sunday school. The teacher was talking about the baptism of Jesus. Then the other children talked about what baptism meant to them.

“But I am not baptized,” remarked Dania.

The teacher, taken by surprise, managed to answer: “You do not need to be baptized in water by the priest. If we love Christ enough, our love for him is our baptism.”

“I think”, said Dania, “that when I get to know him better we will become good friends.”

The very next day the explosion removed Dania from our midst.

“Christ is risen from the dead...” went on the choir. In the midst of unending suffering and anguish Easter had dawned again. The resurrection had not abolished the cross. The words of the risen Christ to Thomas bear witness to that: “Reach your finger here, see my hands. Reach your hand here and put it into my side” (John 20: 27). The Lord’s risen body bears the seal of the cross and so does the advent of Easter in a country torn by war and by the rumors of war.

The experience of death in the midst of life. A whole nation living under the sign of the cross, a country living under death, living in this constant boundary-situation between death and life, reaching out with Thomas and feeling the sting of death in an immediate first-hand touch of the risen Christ, and thus tasting the sweetness and glory of life confronting and overcoming death.

The heritage of the Eastern Church is well-known for this sort of existential theology. You do not start with concepts and ideas but rather with direct experience. And as you go through the purifying fire of boundary-situations all that is non-essential in you disappears.

The community of the church to which we are called is nothing but a transfigured and regenerated humankind. To live in it means being addressed, it means presenting ourselves and perceiving. It is certainly not an accident of our communal history that we should find ourselves in Antioch today, more than ever before, torn by soundless thunderings that obscure the clarity of our vision.

The taste of death all around you lays bare all illusions. It extirpates that which is mediocre in you. It educates you in an infinite manner. It purifies the air. It confronts you time and again with that which your mind cannot fully grasp and from which it nevertheless cannot turn away. Thomas must have experienced this as he reached out with his doubting finger. He must have realized that there is a way of knowing which explores that which is left unexplored by reason and commonsense, a way of being addressed by the power of the resurrection, of life overcoming death. As he joined the other disciples, assembled behind closed doors, he received the sacrament of the crucified and risen Lord who breathed into him the power of his resurrection.

To have experienced this over the last eight years is our way. We have come to realize, in the most serious sense, that the church is created from the open side of the Lord just as Eve was created from Adam's rib. From Christ's pierced side gushed forth water and blood (John 19 : 34), the water of baptism and the blood of the eucharist. The cross is the very advent of the kingdom in the midst of sin and death: "Today thou shalt be with me in my kingdom," said Christ to the thief on the cross (Luke 23 : 43). This is our calling. We are ever reminded of it at every divine office. As we come forth one by one to receive the divine mysteries, the choir sings: "Of thy mysterious supper, son of God today admit me a partaker... like the thief I will acknowledge thee: remember me, Lord, in thy kingdom."

On that memorable Easter morning in a small old church, under the sound of exploding shells, we knew this year, too, that we were gathered together at that particular moment in history to greet the coming one and receive from him the spirit of life and peace. And this spirit is with us always as we gather together to partake of his blessed body and blood. It is with us in every word of the gospel. Everything else around us seems to have gone to pieces.

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes; there shall be an end to death and mourning and crying and pain... Behold I am making all things new" (Rev. 21 : 4-5). How do we proclaim this in Lebanon today when that which is new has not yet dawned upon us? It is as though we live in a huge coal mine which hides in its depths a shining diamond. The Lord is hidden in darkened hearts. The new world is conceived in the mystery of such hearts. When will dawn appear? The darkness of death and suffering covers us with its veil.

Darkness was also upon all the earth at the hour of the crucifixion. At mid-day, at the sixth hour, the hour of the crucifixion, the praying church in the East lives each day anew this ultimate hour in which God's love for us was made fully manifest on the cross of Calvary:

O Christ our God who at his hour didst stretch out thy loving arms upon the cross that all women and men might be gathered unto thee...

It is this love, says Saint Ignatius of Antioch, which abolishes death, the love of God's suffering servant, the truth of Christ's humanity which he calls "a mystery of shouting accomplished in the silence of God" (Eph. 19 : 1), "God in man, true life in death" (7 : 2). This love is a passionate intensity, a freedom from restraint, which surmounts all barriers and holds nothing back, "that all human beings might be gathered unto it".

God is ever incarnate in the very flesh of human history. He is crucified in human pain and agony. We in Antioch have reached the depth of the cup of bitterness and yet ours is a night of expectation. To put it in the words of Saint John of Damascus: "Just as charcoal burns not of itself but through the fire with which it is impregnated... I am but black cold charcoal. In order to be set ablaze by the fire of Pentecost I want the bread of God which is the flesh of Christ of the seed of David, and I want as drink his blood which is love incorruptible" (*de fid. orth.* 4.3). It is the mystery of shouting accomplished in the silence of God, the truth of Christ's

humanity, a passionate intensity, a freedom from restraint, God in man, true life in death. In him only are we more than conquerors. "In him is our focal point... in him is our meeting place in which we may live our peace" (Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogy* I-PG 91, 665-668). He is in us an offering of peace, the "offering as well as him who offers, the interpreter as well as the interpreted" (Sunday liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom). Like Jacob at the brook of Jabbok (Gen. 32 : 22-32), wrestling as we are in darkness, we know that daybreak will come, that we will see God face to face, and that in spite of the fact that we may come out limping because of a dislocated hip, we "will have power with God and with fellow human beings and we will prevail". We pray that daybreak will come soon, and that we will be granted the power to transform the earth into Peniel, "the face of God".

2. From death to life

Peter Kuzmic

The apostle Paul speaks of two tenses when writing about the Christian experience which brought about "life in its fullness": Christians were spiritually dead and empty, but now they are alive in Christ, enjoying the fullness of life given by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 2 : 1-5). The change was not achieved by their good works and intentions nor by adherence to a religion. It was effected solely by God's gracious initiative and the inbreaking of his saving love. "But God, rich in mercy, for the great love he bore us, brought us to life with Christ even when we were dead in our sins" (Eph. 2 : 5).

This describes the change that took place in my life when I encountered Christ as my personal Saviour and Lord. The experience is not easy to describe or explain.

There was a time in my youth when I did not believe the truth of the theme of this Assembly and considered all such affirmations to be utter nonsense. This was primarily due to the shaping influence of an atheistic education within its ideological context, and despite the fact that I grew up in a Christian home. I had serious doubts that even a man Jesus of Nazareth ever existed. I viewed the church people as ignorant and naive, trying to escape from realities and demands of modern life, incapable of understanding and handling the changes brought about by the advance of science and technology. For a time I saw my future mission in freeing man from the bondage of religion and superstitious belief in God. I viewed clergy as hypocrites who were misleading and exploiting the common people.

From the human point of view, there were three factors that converged in bringing me to the foot of the cross of the one who died in order that I may live. First, a continuous, critical search for a coherent meaning and purpose in life. Second, a simultaneous increasing personal awareness and experience of the captivity of people to their own egocentric and sinful nature, realizing that my ideals did not match reality.

Third and most decisive, a loving and praying father who lived and witnessed as a new man in Christ, a witness of answered prayers in transformed lives, restored marriages and occasional physical healings.

These three streams were providentially used by God to bring about a complete turning point from self to Christ. When I put my trust in him, the old rebellious and unbelieving creature was suddenly and completely overwhelmed by the redeeming love of the God-Creator whom I found myself addressing Abba-Father. A burden was lifted, the search was ended, the soul was set free. Jesus Christ became so central and real that an unshakable inner assurance replaced all doubts. An exultant sense of joy and power accompanied the birth of a new man, experiencing for the first time the fullness of life brought about by the Holy Spirit. Looking back, I realize that

it was God's initiative rather than my human quest,
 experience of a moral regeneration of the will
 rather than any rational or spiritual insight,
 disclosure of Christ Himself
 rather than my own discovery,
 effected by the work of the Holy Spirit
 and not by turning to religion or performing any rites.

The Lord is my very life,
 my source of strength,
 my reason for living,
 my life now and
 my hope for the future.

3. The struggle for life

Domitila Barrios de Chungara

I am Domitila de Chungara, the wife of a miner at the twentieth century mine in Bolivia, the biggest in the country. In Bolivia the people have been living in conditions of dreadful poverty for a very long time although the country has great riches. Bolivia produces all kinds of minerals and foodstuffs but we, its inhabitants, live in appalling poverty because of our

• Ms CHUNGARA is president of the miners' human rights organization in Bolivia. Provisional translation from the Spanish by the Language Service, WCC.

dependence on other countries. The mining districts are where the people are most ready to fight, that's where the struggle is going on because a miner's life is terribly difficult. He has to go to work at half past five in the morning, works all day practically without eating and has neither Saturday nor Sunday off. And yet he cannot even cover his family's basic needs. Up till now, the workers have expressed their opposition and struggle in the form of strikes, stoppages, protest demonstrations to support the wage claims. These demonstrations have always been met with massacres, torture, armed attacks on our camps and also coups d'état.

Bolivia has had more than 188 coups d'état in 158 years of its life as a republic. For the last fourteen years we have been living under military dictatorships and for us in our camps this has meant violence, including rape of women. Our sons and daughters have been murdered. All our democratic liberties have been curtailed. There is no freedom of the press. All our trade union organizations and opposition parties have been outlawed. Once a worker stops working he is either harassed or arrested. Workers are punished in two ways, because they lose their liberty and they are cut off from their source of work. The man's family suffers most: because his wife is thrown out of the camp with nowhere to go, nowhere to live with her children and no chance of medical care. The children are even thrown out of their schools.

In our district there were more than 400 families in this position. We got together as housewives to organize ourselves seeing that it was getting close to Christmas, which is a festival of happiness and rejoicing for all peoples. In our country this was a terribly bitter time for us because our children didn't even have any food to eat that day. So we decided to start at once on a strike we had secretly been preparing for some time with the Miners' Federation and the Workers' Centre, with the help of the human rights group. There were four of us women who began the hunger strike, together with our children. That made quite a lot of children because... well... a worker's wife has nowhere to leave her children, she just has to take them with her.

So this hunger strike began — in a country where no one believed in hunger strikes! Everyone in fact tried to stop it. They said that the decision of the women to go on hunger strike over Christmas was a chancy business. But we were thinking of all these families slowly dying, of the terrible agonies they were suffering in our camps, because no one knew about their situation. We said that, if we've got to die, well, we'd rather go that way, but we want everyone to know that children are dying here, that women are dying here, because of the lack of freedom in our land. After we began our hunger strike, all the camp was behind us, and all the workers who came out on strike in sympathy in our support. The peasants were behind us. They blocked the roads to stop the army getting through to suppress the trade unions. Students and factory workers were behind us. There was international backing from people who sent encouraging messages of support. People came out on strike, there were hunger strikes in other countries, and in the end all our people were behind us. We stuck together, and the hunger strike lasted 21 days — 21 days of eating nothing, 21 days of

terror, because we kept on receiving threats. Many of us were dragged out of the places where we were on hunger strike. But we won.

We achieved three of our four demands: an amnesty, recognition of trade unions, and the workers went back to work. But then we saw that the sacrifice of the people, the victory they and the workers had won, had to be built on quickly. We had to take part in elections straight away, so we could have a constitutional government as an expression of the will of the people. People had taken part in three elections, which had been brought to nothing by four coups d'état. But thanks to the resistance they have offered, and their solidarity, once again we have achieved democracy and constitutional government. The Bolivian people today are living under two threats — one is the coup d'état and the other is the drought and floods, which are causing suffering to 40% of the population, and we are asking for everyone's support.

4. Dying and yet we live...

Hyung Kyu Park

It was the dawn of an Easter morning. Thousands of Korean Christians had gathered hurriedly and were hushed to watch the day break; to watch the morning sun break the darkness of death and to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death. That was the Easter Sunday morning of 1973, and we were then experiencing a long, dark night of death under a repressive military dictatorial regime. Korean Christians came to the hilltop, south of the city of Seoul, to see the day break, to pray for the light to come and end that long, dark night of sorrows, and to witness the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the life of the Korean people.

A handful of us, with several other ministers and myself, together with Christian students, had planned to march down the mountain following the Easter service, carrying placards and a wooden cross proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ in our political life. The resurrection of Jesus had to be proclaimed, not only on the mountain top; but also in the city below. We wanted to urge our fellow Christians to overcome the power of death in our political life. In our leaflet we urged Christians to pray for freedom of mission, freedom of speech and democracy; so that our people could live and work and speak like human beings with dignity and their God-given rights.

• Rev. PARK is a pastor of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea.

We thought our demonstration would be an act of overcoming the cruel force of death, because at that time we lived like the dead. There was no freedom of speech, no academic freedom. We had only the freedom of silence, but sometimes even that freedom was taken away — some of us had been forced to support the powers of death. We were determined to challenge death on Easter Sunday morning. We wanted to shout for freedom and democracy and the resurrection of Jesus, as we sang and marched down the hill. We tried to break the silence of death, the silence of the quiet resurrection of Jesus. We dared to confront the political power of death.

Even before we started the march, our placards were confiscated, our wooden cross was broken in pieces by the police, and all of us fled and hid ourselves. Sooner or later, most of us who participated in this event were taken to the military interrogation agency and some of us were sent to prison. The whole event, I thought, was a failure. Very few Christians were able to get hold of our leaflets. Very few of the Easter worshippers saw the cross broken by the police, and no newspapers in Korea printed the happening. Worst of all, no Christians at the sunrise service had cared to join in our Easter march.

So we experienced another death. I was put into solitary confinement. I felt my body become musty in the basement cell. I smelled the rotten stench of death in the rainy season of the long, hot summer of Korea. But I began to see clearly that I was not dying. We were not failures.

At every trial in the court, we heard the testimony of Christian ministers and students about their aspiration for freedom and democracy in the country, and about their experience of the life and cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The court was filled with Christians who came to listen to the testimony. The court became the best place for us to proclaim the Gospel of the Jesus Christ who lived with the poor and oppressed, who died on the cross for the freedom of the people, and who was resurrected for the freedom of the people of the world. As the trial went on, Korean Christians realized that we had confronted the power of death with death; our death in jail and prison, and that we had overcome the power of death.

In the prison cell we were able to read St Paul's letter to the Corinthians out of our own experiences. "We are treated as impostors, and yet we are true: as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and yet behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6: 8-10).

We were dying in prison, but actually we were not dying. We could feel alive and happy in prison when we saw that the life of democracy was living vigorously in the military tribunals, in the faces of the Christians who came to suffer with us in the court, and then entering the struggle for peace and justice and human rights.

5. Life in all its fullness

Mother Euphrasia

This talk is not an ascetic discourse on *life in all its fullness*, but a personal testimony of my experience in the monastic community of which I am a member, one of Romania's most ancient centres of spirituality and pilgrimage. There is, I think, a relationship between the promise in the gospel of life in all its fullness and the monastic life, which has as its sole aim to "live according to the gospel", that is, to live intensely in the love of Jesus Christ, in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells" (Col. 2:9). Spiritual life in a monastic community is the most faithful living out of the gospel, because we are able to say in all humility that we "have come to fullness of life in Christ" (Col. 2:10). I am encouraged to speak of this experience for two reasons: first, because recent research into the tradition of Hesychasm in Romania¹ has brought out the influence exerted by monasticism on piety and social ethics in former times; and, secondly, because monastic communities in our day offer an answer to all who are seeking an authentic life-style. It is my firm belief that those men and women who shut themselves up in their cells to converse with God and who retire into isolation and do theology in voluntary withdrawal from the world can open people's hearts to the love of God.

I should like to emphasize some particular aspects of monastic life...

The Christian life, whether lived in a family or in a monastic community, is based on one's baptism, as initiation into the life of the church, that is, into life lived in loving fellowship with God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and with our brothers and sisters in the faith, and with all our fellow human beings. It is simply a concrete response to differing vocations and the outworking of the various charisms received in baptism. Viewed in that light, monastic vows are simply a renewal of one's baptismal vows. Monastic life is a particular vocation, but it has as its aim one common to all Christians, life lived according to the gospel, or life in Christ — because baptism, which is common to all Christians, is a new birth, a passing from life lived for ourselves to life lived for God and with God, for our fellow human beings and with them. Beyond the differences of form which various vocations take, the Christian life has love, *agape*, as its sole basic principle. People do not come into being by themselves or for themselves, but always for a life lived in fellowship with others. The Christian life in the church is always existence for others. And that fellowship alone gives life its fullness. Selfishness, whether individual or collective, in the family or monastic community, always leads to impoverishment of life; it is an attack of life's fullness. For that reason, the Orthodox Church does not see Christian life lived in the family and Christian life lived in the monastic community as opposites.

• Mother EUPHRASIA is the mother superior of the monastic community of Deolu of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate. Translation from the French, WCC Language Service.
¹ See *Paterikon roumain* and *Anciens centres hesychastes roumains*, by Fr Ioanikie Balan, Romanian Patriarchate, Bucharest, 1980 and 1982, both containing new material in this field.

The Orthodox people have always respected and loved their monasteries, and there are very close links between monasteries and parishes. The spiritual influence of the monasteries affects parish life. The interest shown by parishes in monasteries as places of spiritual refreshment means that the monasteries are involved in providing spiritual, missionary and pastoral help to the parishes. Those living in the parishes have brothers and sisters who are monks and nuns. Those living in the monasteries pray day and night for the whole church and the whole world. Thus bound together in one life, Orthodox Christians acknowledge that the one life in Christ or in the Holy Spirit can be lived fully following differing vocations which have the same aim: the fulfilment of the commands of the gospel.

The monk's identity can be summed up in these words from the tradition of our fathers: "The monk is one who is separated from everyone and united with everyone." How do those who have left all behind and withdrawn from the world live the Christian life in its fullness? That is a challenge often directed at us! The word *monahos*, or *monahia*, meaning "the person who is alone", can give the impression that the spiritual life of the monastery is an isolated life. But monks and nuns are not merely celibate. Those who practice monastic asceticism understand their life differently from that.

Their life is based on the complete giving of themselves to God and on continuing fellowship with him. Everything else is understood, organized, lived and expressed on the basis of that relationship at the centre of their lives. Everything is to be held together as one because it has that relationship at the centre. Thus, the word *monahos* can mean a human being possessing an inner unity. That is why the most important activity in the monastic life is prayer (the prayer of the heart or Jesus Prayer).

The monk and the nun are called to live their lives in such a way that their lives become a prayer, an unceasing conversation with God. Their spirit must always keep watch and pray.

The desire truly to live begins when we desire to pray. Prayer in that sense is a difficult step to take. People today are secularized and they run away from prayer because they are afraid to look into their inner lives, which are very often fragmented and disintegrated. Prayer restores the human spirit to a state of fellowship and love. It makes an individual into a person. Someone praying, that is, with face turned towards God, is like a sunflower turned to the sun — the source of their life and identity. That is why the love of monks and nuns for God is expressed first by praying and grows out of their praying. Their love for the world is expressed first by their praying for the world.

Modern thought, which is very often dualist and reductionist, thinks of contemplation and action as opposites. But in Orthodox monasticism there is no division between the contemplative and the active life. The two complement each other — the spiritual life, union with God, sustains charity and transforms physical and mental work done for our neighbours. In Orthodox asceticism all is at once individual and communal, contemplative and active. They cohere in a way which is apparently paradoxical, but which is basically harmonious and melodious. That is what the Fathers

meant when they said that you should pray as you work, keep watch while you sleep, be fasting while you eat, and speak while remaining silent. All this spiritual activity leads to purity of heart, which is nothing short of the liberation of the individual from the tyranny of the passions. For those whose hearts are pure will see God (Matt. 5 : 8). It is the vocation of those with pure hearts to see God. They will see him only if they are freed from all the evil passions troubling the heart (Matt. 15 : 19), which lead human beings to corruption, decay and death. Conversely, purity prepares the heart for true peace, that deep spiritual stillness and calm which the Fathers call *hesychia*. It is the calm which Our Lord referred to when he said: "Let not your hearts be troubled..." This peace frees human beings from the restlessness of the world, from their state of chronic anxiety. This calm frees them from the spiritual anguish of a life foolishly ruled by pride. How can this emptiness be filled?

Hesychia is the supreme mark of the ascetic life and of our victory over our passions. For St John Climacus *hesychia* is the sum of the virtues, paradise restored, heaven in our hearts. It is a different way of speaking of the gifts of the Spirit mentioned by the apostle Paul (Gal. 5 : 22). The hesychast (in Romanian "sihastru") possesses these gifts and exhales them in all directions like the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ (2 Cor. 2 : 14), as a flower gives off its scent or the sun sheds abroad its kindly light.

That is why the purity of the Christian is not comparable to apathy, detachment or spiritual nihilism. Hesychasts are "dead" to everything that is passion, but at the same time "alive" for everyone. They perpetually radiate a spirit of generosity, self-surrender and compassion for others without any trace of selfishness. They communicate their warmth to others, like a power assuring them that they are not alone. Saints are like the innocent lamb, always ready for self-sacrifice and to bear the suffering of others. But at the same time, they are like a firm steady rock on which people can lean. Such love and such firmness are nothing less than the reflection and the witness of the presence of Christ in all those who live the monastic life.

Monastic vows are also a challenge to the false gods of wealth, pleasure and pride. Seen in that light, they have an ethical message for all Christians, and everyone should try to live by them in a form appropriate to their particular vocation.

The monastic life is repentance and joy, experience of the cross and celebration of the resurrection in the midst of daily life. The black habit of the Orthodox monk or nun symbolizes their permanent state of repentance, of *metanoia*. The habit is a sign of mourning and it reminds its wearers that they should at every moment of every day die to sin, crucify selfishness in themselves, so as to find forgiveness and genuine love for God and their fellow human beings. "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18 : 13) is the monastic prayer *par excellence*.

But, while their habit is black, their faces by contrast are radiant with everlasting joy, the joy of fellowship and reconciliation with God. We call our monks *calugari*, from the Greek *kalogeros*, that is, those whose body has become the temple of the Holy Spirit. That spiritual beauty is the com-

pletion of the ascetic's upward journey symbolized by the heavenly ladder. Generally, because they are humble and discreet, Orthodox monks and nuns never speak of their own spiritual experiences, but the quality of their lives is manifest in their spiritual beauty, in which we can portray the new humanity. The monastic life is marked by both asceticism and joy; it is a struggle against selfish passions and a celebration of glory; it is prayer and sharing, repentance and hope, a quest for the kingdom of heaven and prayer for the world. It has become in large measure a pattern for the Church's spiritual life, bringing together the love of the cross and the joy of the resurrection so as to express the fullness of life in Christ. By means of a life lived in conformity with the Gospel, the monastic community becomes a churchly family and the family becomes a spiritual community.

It is interesting to note that, having "fled" the world in order to devote ourselves more fully to prayer, we very often find ourselves invaded by the world! The approximately one hundred Orthodox monasteries in Romania are thronged with men and women from town and village at the great patronal festivals.

The lay people love our monasteries, because they find in them not only an atmosphere of holiness but particularly a source of life, light and love for the world. Although we are separate from the world outside, we call that world to repentance and salvation by our discipline and life-style. As I said before, there are close links between the community in the monastery and the community in the parish. In the monastery the beatitudes are seen in an eschatological perspective, while the parish is itself the setting for living them out in history. Many lay people are reviving the practice of ceaseless prayer to Jesus Christ in their daily lives. The great collection of writings called the *Philokalia*² and the books on asceticism written by monks are being read more and more widely. We marvel at the ascetic life of many Christians, who are an example to us all. Lay people are writing new prayers and new liturgical poems for us. Moreover, there are monks and nuns who have become body and soul true intercessors to God for the world. They devote themselves to unassuming but persistent prayer that all may become one in Jesus Christ. Their spiritual power stands in contrast to their humble life-style.

Monks and nuns are called by their vocation to live a unified life, stripped of all ambiguity and fragmentation. That is why they are always calling people to the underlying unity of all people in God. Monastic life makes a contribution to the unity of the life of the Church and of the *oikoumene*.

² Translated into Romanian in ten volumes with commentary by Fr Dumitru Staniloae. There is a partial English translation from the Russian in *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* and *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, Faber & Faber, London, 1951 and 1954.

6. A testimony to love

Maria Teresa Porcile Santiso

I thought the best way to give a testimony to love was to lend my voice present here today to the many voices we carry in ourselves, to be channel of voices without a voice, and to give expression to those great or small testimonies to love which become our daily bread, like the bread Elijah received from the raven. And I began to call love to mind...

love seen

love received

love desired.

I remembered, as if in a solemn memorial, as if in a sacrifice of love celebrated upon the world, the communication of love among the poor, and those who suffer, the loving gaze of silent gratitude in the eyes of the sick, the old, the children, of those we consider useless, unproductive...

Then I thought of those whose only luggage they carry through life are the days gone by and the days yet to be lived, and their dawn of hope — faint yet indestructible — hope which becomes the only reason for living and loving life.

And I began an inventory of love, of facts, events, anecdotes and the actual histories which have built the inhabited world or the habitable world — the *oikoumene* of Love.

Then I thought of lending my voice to the search of artists, and to bring you the testimonies of love and life the world receives today in different languages of shape and colour, and in the numerous combinations of diverse ingredients which compose the immense variety of cries of love and of the heart-breaking protests of life and love.

I then thought of seeking out and bringing the answers of a group of Christians committed to the church and to history, to the gospel and its demands in social life. Experiences lived by base communities, groups for reflection, and groups of lay people.

And I started asking questions, of myself and others...

— “What does love mean to me?”

— “What does it mean to us?”

— “How do we love?”

— “How do we love as a Christian community?”

— “Do you know anybody who loves truly, who celebrates love or who preaches love in deeds?”

— “Have you ever recognized a dash of pure untainted love, anywhere?”

What would you say if somebody asked you for a testimony to love?

And I received many answers, and love appeared with a thousand faces: love, service, company, consolation, being there, tenderness, warmth and joy.

• Prof. PORCILE is teaching theology at the Theological Institute of Montevideo, Uruguay. Translated from the Spanish by the WCC Language Service.

And among the thousand faces of love, I thought I could see the image of the saint, the holy man of God, or the holy woman of God, and I saw the features of those faces who have gone through the terrible and Paschal experience of meeting the living God, and I found some people — and all of us will find some people — but they were not many; and I felt I had to sharpen my ear and my sight to perceive traces of Agape, however dazzling or brilliant Eros and Philia seemed to be.

And I do not know why... I then remembered Sodom and Gomorrah, and wondered:

Where could those ten be, who are supporting the world with their pillars of Love?

And my heart's reminiscing led me to paraphrase Jeremiah's words:

They talk and cry, "Love, love," but there is no love.

And yet, I did not want to join my voice to the chant of the "professional prophets" and cry:

"Love, love"

where there is no love...

It is true that there are those inexhaustible parables of love and those songs of hope and joy of so many Christians in this world. But the deafening noise of the crazy race for power of all kinds smothers that song, and old Koheleth sidles up to me and whispers, "Have you anything NEW to say?" And Koheleth goes on:

"How many good tidings, how many fine initiatives...

There are reasons for hope,

buds of new forces appear here and there

in the new churches

in the third world

in the fourth world we all carry

somewhere in our hearts;

but really,

everything suffers from the same sin —

there are works of love but LOVE is not there;

there are efforts for union, but there is no UNITY;

there is a presence of the church but the Una Sancta

suffers the dramatic consequences of the sin of division."

And I felt the eyes of the Lord upon me, Christ, life of the world, and his hands and his tears over the dead Lazarus, and over Jerusalem. And the words of the supreme commandment filled the air:

"Be one...

and if you are not one, do not talk of Love because you stain love and love on unclean lips becomes a wound and adultery.

These gestures of love are fruits of life, withered before their time, fruits of my life, which is the life of the world, life for the world, cut off from me, each on its separate branch.

What sap can you receive from the vine?

What fruits of love can you produce?

What testimony of love can you offer?

You have my cross, the cross of the world. Carry it together, carry my cross, all of you, and there shall be an Easter of resurrection.”

Listening to these echoes of the gospel, I said to myself:

Is there anything to say that has not been said already?

Is it still possible to add something NEW, different?

The father and life incarnate cry

with gestures — words of Life — a testimony,

and the world does not recognize the time, nor receive the visit of the Lord of Love.

And then I remembered the promise:

“The Spirit shall bring you into the fullness of truth,

To complete the afflictions of Christ.”

The hour has come, the hour has come,

The cry of the prophets is reaching us across the ages,

But when the hour has come,

there are no more warnings,

no more testimonies, no chance of conversion.

When the hour has come, prophecy is no more,

it is the time of apocalypse,

there is no more time for tasks, or programmes, or projects, or plans.

There is nothing because the time is up

nothing, not even a cry.

Everything is silence, deep silence,

full of fear and expectation,

... but also of unshakable trust

for the “little remnant” owned by the Living God.

Only one thing is urgent,

before all else,

primal,

that which was from the beginning:

to renew the Covenant of Love.

There, in the loneliness of the desert,

in the primitive time of first love,

in commitment and renewal of the Covenant,

Jerusalem, the adulteress and the saint,

the “casta meretrix” of the fathers of the church,

shall have to make her last choice:

Jerusalem — Church,

the poor woman, the Church,

able to give birth to God, the daughter of Zion.

In the desert,

harassed day after day in a chain of days unending,

she will give birth to a Son, Life of the world,

the only one who can defeat the powerful dragon with the feet of clay.

In heaven, the trumpet sounds:

“Silence: it is the hour of the great battle.”

Steps Towards Communication

Impressions from the Dialogue
between Theologians of the
First and the Third World

Jean-Pierre Thevenaz

First of all, I am profoundly thankful to the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) for having initiated this dialogue with theologians and lay people of North America and Western Europe which was held in January 1983 in Geneva, Switzerland. Such occasions represent a real need and should be multiplied. The theme "Doing theology in a divided world" posed a tremendous challenge to the participants. The issue is how we can move towards greater universality in the analysis of the facts and in the proclamation of the Gospel, while at the same time remaining sensitive to the particular local struggles; how theology can become a joint venture between Catholics and Protestants, women and men, East and West, spiritualists and rationalists.

In Europe and North America the dialogue had been prepared by various national groups which are relating their theological reflection to social struggles, to national and international issues and to the conscious existence of a popular church. The groups in German-speaking Switzerland, for instance, presented the action of Swiss Christians to bring about stricter regulations for the banking system. I myself presented in the name of the French-speaking group our campaign to change the status of foreign workers in Switzerland.¹ This way of preparing the encounter accounted for the absence of some of the better known theologians from Europe and North America who, while they are very open to the dialogue with colleagues from the third world, are seldom involved in local Christian action groups within their own countries. The last-minute invitation of some of them only created an imbalance in the meeting without compensating for the absence of others. Obviously, the articulation of theological insights in the context of social involvement has not been sufficiently advanced

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¹ "Etre solidaires, est-ce déjà une théologie?", *Cahiers Protestants*, Lausanne, No. 2, 1983. In Italian: *Il Regno*, Bologna, No. 478, 1983. In English: *Migration Today*, WCC, June 1983.

among Europeans for them to make an elaborated contribution to the dialogue.

Parallelism or convergence?

EATWOT chose a method of work centred on personal encounter, the sharing of experiences and working in small groups. We listened to one another rather than working together on a common analysis. There was no preparation on the level of systematic synthesis.

The meeting therefore did not build on the work of previous meetings of EATWOT and none of the documents produced at these meetings (held since 1976) was available. Nor was there any mention of the developments since the encounter in 1973 which had ended, according to some participants, in "incommunication".² When I finally located the report of that meeting on my return from Geneva, I realized that certain hot topics had — ten years later — been avoided rather than confronted and resolved.

Only Philip Potter alluded to that encounter in his opening address. Neither James Cone (USA), nor Hugo Assmann (Costa Rica) mentioned it, nor Georges Casalis (France), all of whom had been participants. Is it really past or was it necessary to find a way to start from scratch again?

There is no doubt that some new ways have been found in the meantime, especially in terms of the development of "inductive" theologies within the European and the North American contexts. The efforts in the third as well as in the first world to find a theological expression rooted in the historical experience of people have by now acquired an assurance, a rigor and a certain fullness which allow them more easily to enter into dialogue with classical and traditional positions. The inter-continental dialogue between equals is now developed, not least because of the work of the WCC. The monopoly of classical theology has been broken.

But can we say that a convergence is developing? First, it should be noted that even among third world theologians convergence is more an objective than an accomplishment, as is evident from the reports of previous meetings of EATWOT. The discovery of convergence is a long process especially between those theologians more concerned with spiritual and cultural struggles of their people and those who are more sensitive to the material and political struggles of people. There is, for instance, a learning process going on among Latin-Americans with respect to indigenous popular religion as a result of their encounter with Asians. What about Europeans? Are they any further advanced or are they like everybody else, torn between religiosity and rationality? They have not yet overcome that contradiction, the tension which causes us to swing from one pole to the other instead of integrating them within a comprehensive historical experience.

Moreover, convergence would have to occur on two levels both of which are only defined in outline. There needs to be convergence between social analysis and theological understanding of the situation. For the moment we designate those levels by certain symbolic double expressions, such as oppression and deliverance, poverty and resistance, domination

² Cf. *Risk*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1973.

and identity or death and life. The apparent rationality of domination is met by a rationality of resistance on the part of the oppressed. Their history is that of an emerging identity, moving from dependence towards full existence. We are witnessing today the elaboration of a theology which is rooted in this reality and which expresses the faith that accompanies this pilgrimage.

But neither social theories nor theological doctrines will lead us to the convergence we are looking for. This will require Christian communities which are rooted in their history and there receive together the call of the Gospel. I consider the meeting in Geneva to be historic because it is a step towards such an encounter between Christian communities. We could not fully meet the challenge, and it remains a challenge for future dialogues.

The place of theology

Committed groups and communities constitute, therefore, the proper place for the practice of theology and this practice is the concern of lay people as well as of professional theologians. This is, incidentally, well expressed in the final statement issued by the meeting.

The participants focused on a new way of doing theology. As distinguished from the prevailing ways of doing theology it begins with involvement in struggles and hopes of oppressed peoples and includes social analysis and theological reflection. In this context the key is not the theologian's academic qualifications but his or her participation in the struggle; the theological expression is not only rational discourse but also such forms as art, poetry, music and dance.³

It would be a mistake to interpret the meaning of these words as an attempt to reduce theology to practice or to the mere consciousness of oppression. Raymond Fung misses the point somewhat in the *Monthly Letter of Evangelism* (January 1983) when he says:

Believing that the oppressed people themselves are doing theology in their stories, feminists, the unemployed, the retired and the handicapped formed the bulk of the first world delegation, while from the third world almost all were formally trained theologians with doctoral degrees more than enough to share among them. Something must be wrong somewhere.

This is a doubly deformed image of the meeting. First, at previous meetings of EATWOT the participation of lay people from the continent in which the meeting took place was always required in order for the participants to be directly in touch with the experience of local Christian communities involved in the social struggles. Secondly, it is not true that the composition of the different delegations was so divergent. In each of them the majority was made up of theologians who served as animators or educators of action groups. This is precisely the definition of the theologian's status offered in the statement, as well as the place of his or her theology. It is animation and the accompanying of the struggles and the formation of Christians committed to the struggles. There was broad agreement on this point and it reflects an important reality which can serve as the basis for future

collaboration and for the development of a common theological methodology. Here are some of the questions we had in common:

- When discussing in small groups: When? Where? How?
- When referring to the Bible: What type of interpretation? What relation to the “spontaneous” readings practised by involved lay people? What weight to be given to the biblical interpretation in the midst of action?
- When renewing the church’s tradition: How much to be critical, and how much to be concerned about continuity?

Committed theologians from the third and the first world can work together on these questions as long as two conditions are met. First, the identity of the local group must be recognizable in the biblical interpretation offered; second, concrete projects and utopias must emerge out of an understanding of the practice of Jesus and of the people of God. Such conditions require that we take our distance from academic and traditional theology and that we seek new answers to the questions posed.

Evidence or critique?

Towards the end of one of the plenary sessions there was suddenly an avalanche of observations which were symptomatic of the desire to work together on certain difficult issues.

Marie-Andrée Roy (Quebec): In order to eliminate sexism in theological language we have to start with the language of the Bible. How are we to deal with the loss of the purity of the Bible?

Carl Gaspar (Philippines):⁴ The skins of our concepts are too old for the new wine. They are not passionate, they do not come from the heart, and life is not in them!

Ivone Gebara (Brazil): Our discourse even linked to reality is never inductive because it is related to Jesus. But can this look at reality itself be looked at? What is basically its purpose?

Rose Zoe-Obianga (Cameroun): This has been a good session, but what is lacking is for you (Westerners) to tell us how you understand us and what you think about us. Is there nothing you want to criticize us for?

As we can see, the dialogue did not merely repeat known ideas. It went beyond them in that there was both self-criticism and mutual criticism. Even the first world, the champion of critical thinking, needs to learn anew to critique its own rationality. It must learn again to listen before once again posing impertinent questions. If its own theology is not adequate to deal with the global situation of today, the hour for criticizing others has perhaps not yet come. And yet, we Westerners need to pose all kinds of impertinent questions, inspired by the critical tradition which has marked us, as Dorothee Sölle reminded us. Are people not too quickly deceived by false obviousness, by what they take to be “natural” and “authentic”, but which may not be truly liberating?

⁴ Mr Gaspar has since been imprisoned in the Philippines; he was later released without any charges brought against him.

However, we must recognize that the spirit of criticism has itself been deceived by false obviousness and has become stuck in a cold and dry rationality, in inhuman and destructive logic. The only so-called "modern" theology is that of the secularized social elite. The peoples in the first world reject this modernization just as do the peoples of the third world who call it "Westernization". As theologians formed by this "modernity" we are brought to the realization of the point to which our secularized culture involves a repressive and destructive way of thinking. Therefore, we need to identify the positive elements of critical rationality and to distinguish them from its destructive effects. Some of the most exciting moments of the conference occurred around this issue.

Where will the life of God rise again whom our first world has so often declared dead! It will be at the opposite end of our ideological and military defence in the first world, at the antipodes of the imperialistic claims of our economy and our culture, at the antipodes of our idolatry and our abstract doctrines...

God at the antipodes! But these antipodes are not some far away exotics in the third world. They can be found among us hidden like the back of our familiar sets, behind the idols which still fascinate us: security, productivity, success, privileges... God, the God of the Exodus and of Jesus Christ, resists the idols of domination and gives a new value to life, to its quality and spirituality, to its basic needs and to peace. The symbols of this resistance of life in the midst of a murdered and divided world, whether religious or not, must be the focus of the work of theology wherever Christian communities find in them expressions of open horizons for their society.⁵

⁵ In this respect see the "Letter to our sisters and brothers in the Christian communities", drafted at the end of the meeting, in the night of 12-13 January 1983.

Ecumenical Chronicle

LIFE TOGETHER

The following is the Message from the WCC's Sixth Assembly, held in Vancouver, 24 July - 10 August 1983:

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, from the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, Canada. We represent four hundred million people of three hundred member churches. Among us women, young people and persons with disabilities are participating in larger numbers than before. Thank you for your supporting prayers. We are filled with praise to God for the grace given to us since our last meeting. In many places churches have grown in numbers and depth of commitment. We rejoice in courage and faith shown in adversity. We are humbled by those newly called to be martyrs. The Holy Spirit has poured out these and many other gifts, so that we meet with thanksgiving.

This meeting comes in a succession which began at Amsterdam in 1948 with the commitment to stay together. Since then we have been called to grow together and to struggle together. Here under the theme "Jesus Christ — the Life of the World" we are called to live together. In the Assembly we taste that life. Our worship in a great tent which reminds us of the pilgrim people; the presence of Canadian Indians which has challenged us; our moving prayer and praise in many languages but one spirit of devotion; our struggles to face divisive issues; the songs of children — all are part of life together in the Christian family. The significant participation of guests from other faiths and of thousands of visitors speaks to us of the wider human community.

This engagement together in Vancouver underlines how critical this moment is in the life of the world, like the turning of a page of history. We hear the

cries of millions who face a daily struggle for survival, who are crushed by military power or the propaganda of the powerful. We see the camps of refugees and the tears of all who suffer inhuman loss. We sense the fear of rich groups and nations and the hopelessness of many in the world rich in things who live in great emptiness of spirit. There is a great divide between North and South, between East and West. Our world — God's world — has to choose between "life and death, blessing and curse".

This critical choice compels us to proclaim anew that life is God's gift. Life in all its fullness reflects the loving communion of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the pattern for our life, a gift filled with wonder and glory, priceless, fragile and irreplaceable. Only when we respond in a loving relationship with God, with one another and with the natural world can there be life in its fullness. The misery and chaos of the world result from the rejection of God's design for us. Constantly, in public and private, fellowship is broken, life is mutilated and we live alone. In the life of Jesus we meet the very life of God, face to face. He experienced our life, our birth and childhood, our tiredness, our laughter and tears. He shared food with the hungry, love with the rejected, healing with the sick, forgiveness with the penitent. He lived in solidarity with the poor and oppressed and at the end gave his life for others. In the mystery of the Eucharist the resurrected Lord empowers us to live this way of giving and receiving. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Only the converting power of the Holy Spirit enables this way of life to be formed in us. Such a transformation is costly and means the willingness to risk even death in our Kingdom pilgrimage.

On that road we acknowledge our unfaithfulness. The division of the Church at central points of its life, our failure to witness with courage and imagination, our clinging to old prejudice, our share in the injustice of the world — all this tells us that we are disobedient. Yet God's graciousness amazes us, for we are still called to be God's people, the house of living stones built on Christ the foundation. One sign of this grace is the ecumenical movement in which no member or church stands alone.

The Assembly therefore renews its commitment to the ecumenical vision. The Lord prays for the unity of his people as a sign by which the world may be brought to faith, renewal and unity. We take slow, stumbling steps on the way to the visible unity of the Church but we are sure the direction is essential to our faithfulness. Since the Nairobi Assembly there has been movement in many places, new united churches, acts of common witness, local ecumenical projects. There is new theological convergence which could enable decisive steps towards one eucharistic fellowship. We especially thank God for the hope given to us by the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" document and seek widespread response to it.

We renew our commitment to mission and evangelism. By this we mean that deep identification with others in which we can tell the good news that Jesus Christ, God and Saviour, is the Life of the World. We cannot impose faith by our eloquence. We can nourish it with patience and caring so that the Holy Spirit, God the Evangelist, may give us the words to speak. Our proclamation has to be translated into every language and culture. Whatever our context among people of living faiths and no faith, we remember that God's love is for everyone, without exception. All are invited to the banquet. Jesus Christ, the living bread, calls everyone who is hungry, and his food is unlimited.

We renew our commitment to justice and peace. Since Jesus Christ healed and challenged the whole of life, so we are called to serve the life of all. We see God's good gift battered by the powers of death. Injustice denies God's gifts of unity, sharing and responsibility. When nations, groups and systems hold the power of deciding other people's lives,

they love that power. God's way is to share power, to give it to every person. Injustice corrupts the powerful and disfigures the powerless. Poverty, continual and hopeless, is the fate of millions; stolen land is a cause of bitterness and war; the diversity of race becomes the evil imprisonment of racism. We urgently need a new international economic order in which power is shared, not grasped. We are committed to work for it. But the question comes back to us, what of the Church? Do we yet share power freely? Do we cling to the wealth of the Church? Do we claim the powerful as friends and remain deaf to the powerless? We have tasks near home.

Injustice, flagrant, constant and oppressive, leads to violence. Today life is threatened by war, the increase in armaments of all sorts, and particularly the nuclear arms race. Science and technology, which can do so much to feed, clothe and house all people, can today be used to terminate the life of the earth. The arms race everywhere consumes great resources that are desperately needed to support human life. Those who threaten with military might are dealing in the politics of death. It is a time of crisis for us all. We stand in solidarity across the world to call persistently, in every forum, for a halt to the arms race. The life which is God's good gift must be guarded when national security becomes the excuse for arrogant militarism. The tree of peace has justice for its roots.

Life is given. We receive God's gift with constant thankfulness. At the Assembly's opening worship a mother held up her baby at the Lord's table. It was a sign of hope and of continuity of life. Sometimes we are almost overcome by the smallness and insignificance of our lives; then we feel helpless. But as we feed upon the bread of life in worship we know again and again God's saving act in Christ in our own lives. We are astounded and surprised that the eternal purpose of God is persistently entrusted to ordinary people. That is the risk God takes. The forces of death are strong. The gift of life in Christ is stronger. We commit ourselves to live that life, with all its risks and joys, and therefore dare to cry, with all the host of heaven, "O death, where is your victory?" Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

MESSAGE FROM THE VATICAN

The following message, dated 12 July 1983, was sent to Dr Philip Potter, WCC General Secretary, on the occasion of the Sixth Assembly:

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you” (1 Cor. 16:23). As the delegates and other participants of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches gather in Vancouver, I wish to assure you of my deep pastoral interest and closeness in prayer.

I am pleased that, for this important meeting in the service of the ecumenical movement, you have decided that the central theme would be: “Jesus Christ — the Life of the World”. In doing this, you have reached out to Christians everywhere, to all who confess faith in Jesus Christ, believing that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). You have affirmed our common belief that Jesus is the crucified Saviour, the Redeemer of all, the Lord of life who was “designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4), the risen Christ whose oneness with us in all things but sin has firmly established the dignity and worth of every human being.

Ecumenical endeavours such as this bear witness to the ever increasing longing of Christians today that the prayer of Christ may be fulfilled: “that they may be one” (John 17:22). This urgent task, which still encounters many difficulties, is indeed challenging and multi-faceted. It requires obedience to the will of God and cooperation with his grace. It demands persevering faith and steadfast hope. Above all, it impels us to constant prayer and continual conversion.

As I have made pastoral visits to the Catholic Church in various parts of the world, it has been a special pleasure for me to have met with representatives of a number of the member churches of the World Council. Many also have come to Rome to further our common efforts of dialogue and mutual understanding. Such contacts have advanced the cause of Christian unity, and I trust that the present gathering in Vancouver will bring

about even further progress towards this goal for which we all long.

Upon all taking part in the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, I invoke the wisdom, light and peace of the Holy Spirit. With the words of Saint Paul I say: “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 16:24).

JOHN PAUL II

**MESSAGE FROM THE
PRE-ASSEMBLY YOUTH EVENT
TO THE WCC SIXTH ASSEMBLY**

We are the young people at the WCC Assembly in Vancouver. We have gathered from many churches all over the world to form new relationships, to work together, to share our experiences, and to witness to our faith in Christ who struggles with us, who compels us to act, who unites us, and who gives us life.

We come from Nicaragua, where we struggle for survival and for freedom from United States' intervention. We come from Africa, where the reality of poverty, disease and oppression by outside forces, and human justice and dignity is being denied, particularly in South Africa where the heresy of apartheid is being justified as biblical. We come from the Middle East where Lebanon's demands for national sovereignty are being ignored by those who wage war on her soil and where the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homeland in the occupied territories is being denied. We come from the Pacific, where our home is being turned into a dumping ground for nuclear wastes. We come from Europe, where the deployment of nuclear arms and militarization bring us daily closer to Armageddon. We come from Asia, where transnational corporations abound and militarization rages on supported by the super-powers which results in the unabated violation of human rights and dignity. We come from the Caribbean, where we are caught in the midst of super-power rivalry and foreign intervention which threatens our daily lives. We come from North America, where we are burdened by capitalistic ideals of consumerism and militarism.

We come from many broken churches and broken communities in a broken world. Our world appears to be far from the one body of Jesus Christ. Christ's desire is to reconcile us to God in one body through the cross.

We have come together in Vancouver and among the many issues that confront and concern us, one emerges with compelling urgency. WE WANT PEACE:

- NOT as the doctrine of national security defines it: repression, covert violence, the absence of war,
BUT as God's shalom built on social justice;
- NOT as the escalation of nuclear armaments,
BUT as the affirmation of human dignity and the meeting of basic human needs;
- NOT as comfort and complacency,
BUT as gospel-rooted conviction and action.

We recognize that we ourselves are caught up in the structures of oppression and alienation, and at the same time we express our gratitude to God for those of us who are participating in the liberating struggles. We come with anguish and desire to be instruments of the manifest power of the gospel.

We therefore commit ourselves to participate with the poor and oppressed in their struggle for justice in order to live in peace. To this end we commit ourselves to go beyond mere proclamations and to search with determination for the means of concrete action in our own situations, in community with others, keeping alive the international and cross-confessional friendships we have formed at this meeting.

We challenge each member church through its delegates at this Assembly to work for unity and the realization of these goals. We challenge the WCC Sixth Assembly to reinforce the ecumenical priorities outlined in this statement. The economic crisis should not be permitted to undermine ecumenical programmes for peace and justice. Unjustified criticism should not be permitted to deter concrete and effective action. In this context, the Programme to Combat Racism must be continued. We commend the Study on the Community of Women and Men in the Church, recognizing the dual

nature of the oppression of women in society and the barriers to full participation of women in the church. Furthermore, WCC initiatives in the following areas must remain priorities: literacy education and liberation through an ecumenical Christian education; disarmament and the opposition to militarism; human rights; communication networking among world youth.

Together we must move forward in the conviction that the One who wills life, wills it for all. The One who wills life, *is* our life. The One who kindles our passion for justice and mercy is the One of whom the scriptures say:

"God will judge between many peoples, and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. People will sit under their own vines, and under their own fig trees, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the Lord our God, for ever and ever." (Micah 4:3-5)

PREVIOUS WORLD COUNCIL ASSEMBLIES REVIEWED

The following overview of previous assemblies of the World Council of Churches was prepared by Giles Semper, an intern with the WCC Communication Department.

In Amsterdam on the morning of 23 August 1948, Archbishop of Canterbury Geoffrey Fisher announced the unanimous acceptance of the proposal that "the formation of the World Council be declared, and is hereby, completed". He called for a moment of prayer. Many testified to the incredulity with which they witnessed this, the opening of the first WCC Assembly; all, however, agreed to the need for such a body, particularly as the churches searched for direction after World War 2.

Bringing together 351 delegates from 147 churches, the Assembly took as its theme "Man's Disorder and God's Design". Predictably, the atmosphere was more subdued than that of the pre-war

meetings of the Faith and Order and Life and Work movements, and it was with grim determination that the Assembly message spoke of the intention of the members "to stay together".

In the event, many were surprised at the extent to which they managed to agree or "agree to differ" over issues of fundamental importance. Theological accord was reached under the sub-theme "the universal church in God's design", stress being laid upon the connection of unity and renewal and the mutual responsibility of the churches to each other and to the world. The manifestation of this in action was taken up by the sections concerned with "the disorder of society" and "the international disorder"; apart from a commitment to aid for refugees, both were as yet only able to define broad criteria for action — the initiation of the idea of the responsible society on the part of the former, and rejection of war and refusal to be aligned with any political system on the part of the latter.

Amsterdam would also be remembered for its strong reassertion of the importance of mission. The report of the section discussing "the church's witness to God's design" called it "the beginning of a new epoch of missionary enterprise". At the same time the Assembly's largely ecclesiastical composition was criticized as the section looked to increased lay participation in evangelism and the work of the church.

The Second Assembly in Evanston, a Chicago suburb, in 1954, took the Council to North America and its largest member churches. It was highly organized and highly advertised, attracting journalists in droves. The pressure which this created was felt by many to have been to the Assembly's detriment.

The theme, "Jesus Christ — the Hope of the World", simultaneously demanding and optimistic, set the tone for an Assembly at which churches committed themselves "to grow together". The dimension of this growth proved, however, to be a point of contention between American and European attitudes, worked out in a debate of the kind of theology later described as "abstruse and meaningless" by Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey. Faith and Order and Life and Work movements

seemed once more to be autonomous as the weight of European theology cautioned against exaggerating the human role in effecting the divinely inspired "Hope of the World".

There was, nonetheless, a large-scale commitment to action, and to definition of the Council's "hope" in more pragmatic terms, faced as it was by the realignment of the world power blocks; the presence of US President Dwight Eisenhower and UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld added impetus to this. The sections, only loosely connected to the main theme, were more specific in their mandates and subtler in their evaluations of problems. Their findings were characterized by a greater accent on service and less on mission than had been the case at Amsterdam, although the question of evangelization in one's own society received attention.

In relation to this a whole section was assigned to "The Laity: the Christian in his Vocation". The idea of the "responsible society" was refined, but now, according to the report, as a standard rather than an absolute; the same section criticized "self-righteous assurance concerning the political and social system of the West" and drew attention to the problems of economically underdeveloped regions. The statement under the sub-theme "Christians in the struggle for world community" demanded international peace and justice; nations, it said, must disarm and recognize the potential role of the United Nations. The assignment of a section to the new subject of racial and ethnic tensions was followed by the establishment of a WCC department.

It was before a much smaller press corps that the Third Assembly met in New Delhi in 1961; if Evanston had answered the interests of the "activists", New Delhi, a centre of ancient spirituality, provided an opportunity for reflection upon the unity at the centre of the ecumenical movement.

One of the new churches that brought the total membership of the Council to almost two hundred was the Russian Orthodox. The ecumenical debut of the Russian and other Eastern European Orthodox was of primary importance at New Delhi for many delegates. "If we

accept this opportunity," said WCC general secretary W. A. Visser 't Hooft, "our ecumenical tasks will not become easier, but we shall surely be greatly enriched."

Review and recommitment at New Delhi was carried out in sections concerned with witness, service and unity, deliberately designed to overlap. The main theme, "Jesus Christ — the Light of the World", remained devotional in importance, although its seeming exclusiveness was dealt with by the "witness" section.

The "service" section made the most forthright attempt to identify itself with the needs of the individual in the third world. Speakers such as Nigerian Francis Ibiam, who was to become one of the two first lay people elected among the six co-presidents of the Council chosen at New Delhi, dismissed the pure "philanthropy" which had characterized the "imperialistic" concern of the past.

The keynote was, however, perhaps provided by the section on "unity". It placed the emphasis, after the initiative of the 1960 Faith and Order conference, on ecumenism at the local church level.

A quiet warning was sounded at New Delhi by Philip Potter, then chairman of the World Student Christian Federation, speaking in a session on "Faith and Order". Young people who would shape the future of the ecumenical movement, he said, were being driven away by the slow progress of unity, and its entrenchment in ecclesiastical institutions and scholastic theology. He spoke to an Assembly at which the departure of some of the "old guard" of ecumenism was noticeable and which threatened to make the theological divide of Evanston much deeper. The 1968 Uppsala Assembly, attempting to do justice to the theme "Behold, I make all things new", would hear the warning reiterated from the youth themselves.

The Fourth Assembly of the WCC met in Uppsala, Sweden, in July 1968. It was one third larger than any of its predecessors, with delegates present from 232 churches in 84 countries. The largest voting delegation was that of the Orthodox, and one third of the participants came from the third world.

The theme, "Behold, I make all things new", assumed a central importance. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, honorary president and retired WCC general secretary, warned that: "Many have their doubts about the relevance of the ecumenical movement and turn away from it with a sense of disappointment." Eugene Carson Blake, the new general secretary, called on the Assembly to "run the risks that true renewal of the churches and of the Council requires".

Many commented that the structure of the Assembly ought to have been renewed before anything else; it was felt that not enough time was devoted to the interrelation of delegates in smaller groups, and that the vast quantity of paperwork was obstructive, rather than conducive to better understanding. Particularly vocal in the call for renewal were youth, who made up a delegation of about 150. Frustrated at unwieldy procedures, they managed, however, to secure three places on each of the Assembly's two policy committees, but were unsuccessful in their application for voting status.

In the event, Uppsala was not noted for its analysis of the church, but rather for its far-reaching examination of the rapidly changing world situation. An economic critique, which included an address by Zambian leader Kenneth Kaunda, led to statements in the sections that sought to assess the plight of the poor and oppressed.

The first of these, dealing with "world economic and social development", called for a transfer of resources from the rich to the poor nations, better trading arrangements, a reduction in expenditure on armaments and the promotion of family planning. The financial responsibility of Christians to "developing countries" was also stressed. The second "economic" section, on "justice and peace in international affairs", included a strong condemnation of racism, and a clause specifically in support of conscientious objectors.

Seen in terms of the atmosphere of Uppsala, the Nairobi Assembly in 1975 was subdued. Said general secretary Philip Potter: "Delegates realized that we were not living in the world of 1968, a time of student revolt." This "cautious" Assembly saw the WCC neither monopo-

lized nor abandoned by the "radical" voices of Uppsala. Potter also noted that it refused to repudiate any WCC positions taken in the past. It approved various WCC constitutional changes.

Michael Manley, prime minister of Jamaica, in calling for more representative structures and pointing to "the clear duty to make common cause with the third world", undoubtedly expressed the tone of "liberation" that was included in the theme, "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites". He was, however, followed by Burgess Carr, then general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, who criticized many third world countries for not looking beyond the first "liberation" to the establishment of effective government. He noted that in Africa there were five life presidents, and that new governments of independent states often came by military coup. Another confession came from Robert McAfee Brown, deeply apologetic about US actions in Asia and Latin America. "Let us first look at the logs within our own eyes before we concentrate on the splinter in someone else's eye." From this standpoint of strong self-criticism, human rights in other parts of the world were vociferously defended, statements being made on the Middle East, Jerusalem, Angola, South Africa, Latin America and East Timor. However, the question arose as to the advisability of making a statement that might harm the life and work of Christians in the countries concerned. This discussion was brought to a head when a letter protesting the persecution of Russian Christians was published by the Assembly newspaper. After lengthy debate, a measure calling for intense consultations on the "religious freedom" clause of the Helsinki Agreement was passed, albeit with significant abstentions.

"ECUMENISM EAST AND WEST"

The following is excerpted from an address by [Eastern Orthodox] Patriarch Ignatios IV of Antioch and All the East during a visit to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, 18-19 May 1983:

We come from a land where earthquakes have decimated whole populations, a land where heresies have flour-

ished, where religion has clashed with religion and where peoples have been trampled underfoot — a land where the most obvious continuity is of strife, blood and fire.

Coming as we do from that background, you will realize our fears and frustrations, but you should also know that the breath of the Spirit is driving us forward to a deep ecumenical understanding, which has led us to humble, harmonious encounter with Western Christians. That encounter has wiped out the memory of the inadequacy of foreign missionary activity within our church environment. Our aim in joining the World Council of Churches was to discover with all Orthodox churches the genuine elements of the gospel in Western Christianity, whose particular concern seemed to us to be to live day by day in faithfulness to the Charter of the Kingdom.

We were aware that, if the schism between East and West had not taken place, the questions raised by the Reformation would not have arisen, or, if they had, would have arisen in a different and less acute way. The dialogue between the churches of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic church challenged us because of its depth.

I am not unaware that some Orthodox and even certain Western circles find it more congenial, more comfortable and (if I may say so) less challenging to limit encounter to the ambit of Western Christendom, between Romans and non-Romans. But it is our firm conviction that to do so would be to the impoverishment of the churches and would result in failure to ask the questions which need to be put to a theology over-preoccupied with the West. That is yet one more reason for a sympathetic and loving Orthodox presence within the Council. May we prove equal to the hope that many Christians place in us.

We understand, moreover, that a certain unhealthy conservatism, due in part to our historical isolation, can make the West impatient with us. But the West itself must learn that the immense problems of society, of development and of practical action in general could not be

approached by East and West in the same way, whatever their situations were. The links between theological contemplation and action (and even culture) are not viewed in the same way by East and West, since we have become different people. In our ecumenical family we are thorns in one another's flesh! But suffering is a spur to prayer, which will bring about the miracle which will enable us to pass beyond our divergences.

Here despite their internal divisions, the Orthodox are together and of one mind in their ecumenical endeavours. The unity of Orthodoxy at the visible level is coming into being. Grace alone

will bring us to that... boldness of which the apostle Paul and the liturgy speak. When Orthodox unity becomes a concrete reality by the spirit of prophecy, dialogue between us and our Christian brothers will become fruitful in unsuspected ways. Perhaps the Antiochene experience of freedom will uncover the deep roots of a Christianity which is not heavily in bondage to the past. Our search for our own Antiochene identity in all aspects of church life will perhaps contribute to make our patriarchate more aware of its role as a witness to Christ in our region and of all that is creative in the Christian world... [*Translated from the French, Language Service, WCC.*]

Ecumenical Diary

Sixth Assembly diary

(based on daily coverage by the Ecumenical Press Service)

THE OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY

Two celebrations marked the opening day of the Sixth Assembly of the Geneva-based World Council of Churches (24 July-10 August).

In the morning, upwards of 3,000 delegates and others here for the Assembly attended a two-hour opening service at the Assembly site, the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. In the afternoon, several thousand more area residents were expected to join them at a public arena downtown for an opening celebration. The morning service was held in a large white-and-yellow-striped tent topped with a cross — the primary place for worship during the 18-day Assembly. There, broadcast journalist and British Methodist Pauline Webb, a member of the WCC Executive Committee and Moderator of its Assembly planning committee, preached on the “word of life”.

In her prepared text Webb, director of religious programming for the external services of the British Broadcasting Corporation, recalled areas of conflict since the Fifth WCC Assembly, in Nairobi in December 1975. “We have seen . . . blood spilt in the streets of Soweto and the camps of Beirut, on the mountains of Afghanistan and in the seas of the South Atlantic, in the bomb blasts of Northern Ireland and the continuing carnage of Central America”, she said. “All over the world, it seems, people are engaged in the bloodletting fanaticism of our time as though human lives were disposable counters in the games of power politics . . . And not even the churches have clean hands in the midst of all this bloody mess.” She urged Christians to be like “good secretaries (who) know how to take the right initiatives because they know the mind and the will of the one for whom they work”.

Delivering the message in the afternoon on the “holy city” was Jean Vanier, founder of L’Arche, a worldwide organization of sixty communities providing homes for mentally handicapped persons. Begun and centred in France, it now includes communities in India, Honduras, Denmark, UK, Haiti, Upper Volta, Australia, US and Canada.

Leading the morning service was Edward Scott, Anglican Archbishop of Canada and Moderator of the WCC Central Committee. In the afternoon, the liturgist was Lois Wilson, immediate past Moderator of the United Church of Canada. Canadian national, provincial, and local government representatives attended the arena event. It was planned by a committee on behalf of the Canadian host churches.

GUESTS OF OTHER FAITHS

Fifteen guests of other faiths had been invited to attend the Sixth Assembly. In addition, the local Assembly planning committee had set up an interfaith centre on the University of British Columbia campus, offering six public programmes with an interfaith theme.

The guests included three Hindus, four Buddhists, two Jews, four Muslims, a Sikh, and an adherent of Native Canadian spirituality. Among them were Shri Shrivatsa Goswami, a North Indian renewal movement leader; Anant Anand Rambachan, a Trinidadian researcher interested in social implications of Hinduism; Fung Wing Ming, a Hong Kong scholar and head of Por Yea Buddhist Nunnery; Marc Tanenbaum, inter-religious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee; Inamullah Khan, Burmese-born general secretary of the World Muslim Congress; Shaykh Yusuf Khan Shakirov, a Soviet Muslim leader; and Gopal Singh, a Sikh who chairs an Indian government panel on minorities and scheduled castes.

The interfaith public programmes included Jewish and Hindu perspectives on the life of the world, Muslim and Native Canadian perspectives on life in community, Buddhist and Sikh perspectives on witnessing in a divided world, and peace and justice issues and dialogue among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

REPORTS BY THE MODERATOR AND THE GENERAL SECRETARY

The churches should move beyond secular political and ideological systems and take their own stands from a Christian perspective, both the Moderator and the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches urged in separate addresses to the WCC Sixth Assembly.

The world's two main ideologies — communism and capitalism — are both inadequate to meet "deepest human aspirations" despite their "almost incredible" material achievements, Edward Scott said in his Moderator's report. Christians have often accommodated themselves to the cultural values enshrined in the systems, instead of critiquing them from a Christian perspective, he said.

Scott noted points of tension between the WCC and its 300 member churches, but observed that growth is unlikely without them. He said that an era of "polite ecumenism" has been succeeded by a situation in which relations are more frank, open, deep, realistic, and forward looking. He suggested, however, that "the Council is more willing to be challenged by the member churches than the churches are to be challenged by the Council".

WCC General Secretary Philip Potter said in his report that at a time when the "very survival of the human race is daily threatened", the gospel of reconciliation calls churches to "take a clear and unequivocal stand for God's will for peace and justice".

Citing the first letter of Peter, Potter said that "the world will be watching us to know whether we will meet the test of being truly a house of living stones, built on the rock of faith in God who wills peace for all, and the rights of all to be fully themselves whatever their creed or sex or race or class or nation" (see also pp. 350-363).

THE PRESENTATIONS OF THE ASSEMBLY THEME

The theme of the Assembly, "Jesus Christ — the Life of the World", was expounded by two theologians, South African Reformed Allan Boesak and North American Eastern Orthodox Theodore Stylianopoulos (see pp. 364-376).

Increasing church opposition to the worldwide nuclear arms race could lead the ecumenical movement to create an "ideology of oppression" that will be used to justify injustice, said Boesak. "Many Christians in the 'third world'", he said, are concerned that "the issue of peace will be separated from the issue of justice, making of 'peace' primarily a North Atlantic concern" while deprivation and injustice, especially in third world countries, are ignored.

"It may be true", he said, "that the issues of justice, racism, hunger and poverty are largely unresolved issues for the ecumenical movement . . . but it cannot be true that we will be willing to use the issue of peace to avoid those dilemmas. One cannot use the gospel to escape from the demands of the gospel." If these unresolved issues are not addressed by the churches, Boesak said, "we will make of our concern for peace an ideology of oppression which in the end will be used to justify injustice".

Stylianopoulos urged Christians to repent of "sinful patterns of triumphalism, intolerance, and persecution". He told the Assembly that the "absolute claim" of the theme "Jesus Christ — the Life of the World" has from Christianity's earliest days been used by Christians to justify un-Christian behaviour. "We need to repent of our sins before the world and seek . . . to find ways of lifting up Christ as an invitation of faith, love and freedom", he said, "an invitation which must not be abused either for selfish ends or to force anyone's conscience. The churches have always had a theory of just war, that a movement may arise when oppressed people have no recourse. But now, churches who have never been peace churches — and in fact have called the peace churches 'heretics' — suddenly turn pacifist when black people are put in a position where they have no other choice."

"Violence in the end does not solve problems," Boesak observed. But he said that the church may sometimes find itself in situations where oppressed people take up arms. "The church must opt for the poor and oppressed", Boesak said, "and even within violent situations must help people understand that violence does not solve anything and must help bring people to the bargaining table, even when that is very hard."

PRESENTATION OF THE FOUR SUB-THEMES

Sub-themes for the Assembly were "Life, a gift of God", "Life confronting and overcoming death", "Life in its fullness", and "Life in unity." They were addressed by a score of plenary speakers.

A nuclear scientist from Scotland told the Assembly participants that scientists, like others, are beset by doubts and fears about the future when confronted with difficult choices about the direction science is taking. John Francis, a UK government assistant secretary responsible for social ser-

vices, said a fundamental law of science is that scientists cannot hold back in their research. Yet, Francis said: “Increasingly scientists, technologists and engineers directly concerned with some of the harder decisions are prepared to open up the debate and acknowledge both the gaps in our present understanding and the need for a wider form of democratic decision-making.”

Finnish Lutheran Archbishop John Vikström gave a theological exposition. Good in the world can often be achieved only through a struggle with evil, the archbishop said. In this situation God the Creator enters the struggle by creating new life and protecting life with the message of love, justice and truth.

In another plenary, former Korean Presbyterian Moderator Hyung Kyu Park said: “We want to die in freedom, rather than to live under the nuclear umbrella. We want to live as our own masters . . . We want justice, which will also bring peace — true peace in the world.”

Helen Caldicott, Australian anti-war physician, graphically described the effects of nuclear war, which she said could kill 750 million persons in the first hour and virtually wipe out the urban populations in the North.

Ugandan Anglican Bishop Misaeri Kauma described the violence that has wracked his country before and after independence. Solutions must be found through the traditional African method of talking things over, he said, through arms reduction and by addressing the problem of poverty. “In spite of this, Uganda as a Christian country continues always to hope for the best. . . . Ugandans have to carry their cross to the very end. Then will come the resurrection,” Kauma said.

Less work and less bread for more people — that’s how a Dutch international development expert described the beginning of the 1980s during another plenary. Jan Pronk, Deputy Secretary General of UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), said the present international economic crisis is more fundamental and complex than any previous one. Double digit unemployment figures in the North and negative economic growth in the South are its hallmarks. The church can help build a system that guarantees work and bread for all, he said, by pointing to values such as survival, social justice and an equitable sharing of resources. “Sharing work and bread with each other and with the yet unborn generation is an ethical ecumenical mandate. Whether the mandate was implemented or not in the past did not have consequences in terms of survival. Now it does,” Pronk observed.

“Eucharistic communion is not only a spiritual or moral unity,” said Russian Orthodox theologian Vitaly Borovoy. “It is an actual realization of the united, integral life in Christ.” Communion in the eucharist “is the realization and peak of church unity”, he added. From this teaching of the ancient church Borovoy drew contemporary implications. “If the bread of the eucharist is the bread of eternal life and in breaking it we enter into communion with Christ and each other, it is only natural that we should fight against hunger, poverty, illnesses and other manifestations of social injustices with regard to other people, who are all other brothers and sisters,” he said.

Material wealth and the fullness of life cannot co-exist, FRG theologian Dorothee Sölle told another Assembly session. Echoing that declaration from a quite different perspective was the session's second speaker, Mother Euphrasia, a Romanian Orthodox monastic nun. Reflecting on her experience, she called monastic vows "a challenge to the false gods of wealth, pleasure and pride" and said they "have an ethical message for all Christians".

It is not only that wealth and fullness of life are incompatible, Sölle said. By participating in structures that impoverish millions of people, the world's wealthy not only make impossible fullness of life for themselves but also strip the poor of life's goodness. "What comes between Christ and the middle classes of the first world is not material poverty but spiritual emptiness."

Mother Euphrasia commended prayer as a difficult but necessary step. "People today are secularized and they run away from prayer because they are afraid to look into their inner lives, which are very often fragmented and disintegrated." Prayer, she said, "restores the human spirit to a state of fellowship and love".

CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

On the second Sunday, Assembly participants celebrated the eucharist using the liturgy which reflects the theological convergence affirmed last year in Lima, Peru, by the WCC Faith and Order Commission on three historically church-dividing questions — baptism, eucharist, and ministry.

Presiding celebrant was Canterbury Archbishop Robert Runcie, an Anglican. With him were six ordained assistant ministers from other traditions and parts of the world — a Lutheran from Denmark, a Reformed from Indonesia, a Methodist from Benin, a Baptist from Hungary, a Moravian from Jamaica, a pastor of the United Church of Canada. Flanked by the two women among them, Runcie repeated the biblical words recalling Jesus' institution of the eucharist, and then the congregation sang (in English to a melody composed by an Argentinian): "Your death, Lord Jesus, we proclaim! Your resurrection we celebrate! Your coming in glory we await!"

The readers and leaders of prayer represented an even broader spectrum, including Roman Catholic and Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, whose official norms (not always observed) generally preclude them from receiving the bread and wine of the communion under such ecumenical auspices.

In his own language, Russian Orthodox Archbishop Kirill led the congregation in prayer "that we may soon attain to visible communion in the body of Christ, by breaking the bread and blessing the cup around the same table". West German Catholic Bishop Paul Werner Scheele read Jesus' words in German from John's gospel: "The bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world."

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CANADIAN PAST

The part of Canada in which the Sixth Assembly took place is a centre of Native Canadian culture. A native arbour, "a sacred meditative area amongst the trees", was set aside on the University campus. Scheduled in the arbour for early the opening morning of the Assembly was the lighting of a sacred flame by a Native elder. The flame burned till the Assembly's close.

At the end of the Assembly's first week, a 15-meter totem pole carried by Native men from Agassiz Mountain Prison was raised as part of Canadian Native day (29 July). Also planned during the Assembly were eight opportunities for participants to take part in a Native purification ritual in a sweat lodge. The public programme included a series of Native forums on such topics as oral history, resources development on sacred lands, land claims, Native spirituality, and Natives in the Canadian justice system.

The Assembly also got a 90-minute summary of the modern history of their host nation during a session led by Canadian actors, musicians, and dancers. Author Deverell's "litany of Canadian identity" had the audience reacting with delight. "We are not Americans because we have a French/English problem . . . because we have enough space to get away from anybody we don't like . . . because we aren't a superpower . . . or the product of a revolution . . ."

A second litany, "Where was the church in all this?" wove its motif through the play. The church began on the side of the colonialists three centuries ago and is trying to be on the side of people today. Just like the German church, it was a largely silent body during the war, allowing the Jews to remain homeless and not able to muster sufficient moral strength to muzzle the government's racist internment of the Japanese.

FOCUS ON THE PACIFIC

One of the sessions of the Assembly focused on the Pacific. Sione A. Havea, Methodist minister and ecumenical pioneer from Tonga, told the Assembly that "our Pacific presence here . . . is clear evidence of the ecumenical perspectives we have taken". After more than a century when the churches of the Pacific were like wood-borers — each weakening the wood as it bored along an independent path — they acknowledged each other and began to work together in partnership in mission with the formation in 1966 of the Pacific Conference of Churches. As a result a "Pacific theology relevant to our situations" is beginning to emerge, Havea said. "We look to our history, our culture as well as the gospel as the measuring rods. Before, the gospel was foreign and Western. Now it is relevant and meaningful. Before, our Christ had blue eyes and spoke English or French. Now we see him brown-eyed; he speaks our language, and is one of us inclusively."

Leslie Boseto, Bishop and Moderator of the United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, told the plenary that the "forces of nuclear power, transnational corporations, religious movements, and international economic systems of the powerful cannot be faced . . . by divided churches and nationalities". He said that "our small groups of islands and

atolls, (so attractive) to the powerful nations, cannot afford to travel independently in isolation from one another. We must travel together as God's community in Christ in our Pacific region."

THE REPORTS FROM THE ISSUE GROUPS

Discussion of the eight major issue groups took up the bulk of the Assembly's time during its final four days, most of which were in plenary session with some 840 delegates and several thousand journalists, guests and observers present. Two issue group reports — on witnessing and on justice — were forwarded to the Central Committee after debate. The "witnessing in a divided world" document was criticized primarily for lacking input from recent WCC mission and evangelism materials. The "struggling for justice and human dignity" report was sent back for revision following criticism of its strident tone and the apocalyptic images used in its theological section. Six other issue group reports were received by the Assembly and are to be forwarded to the WCC's 301 member churches for study and action.

The report on "taking steps towards unity" says both "prayer and action help deepen our understanding of faith". And it reiterates the WCC's goal of "visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship". The "moving towards participation" report suggests how churches can use "special gifts" of laity, women, youth, the elderly, children and the disabled. It also urges churches "to support people's movements and development groups".

Viewing people as the key to the success of health care, the report on "healing and sharing life in community" was unanimously received by the Assembly. After a short discussion, suggestions that aging, dying, sharing in mission, the sanctity of life (in the recommendation dealing with abortion and medical ethics) and the sharing of wealth be taken into account in final editing were accepted.

Nuclear deterrence can never provide the foundation for genuine peace. It must be categorically rejected as contrary to faith in Jesus Christ, says the "confronting threats to peace and survival" report. Agreeing that national security can be a legitimate concern, the report challenges concepts of national security that "exceed the needs of legitimate defence or seek economic, political and military domination of others".

Theological education for the "whole people of God", not just clergy, is affirmed in the "learning in community" report. "Theology is . . . a reflection on faith in God and its implications, including life-style, decision-making, equipping for action in society, and relationship with God and persons," the report says. And it calls for theological education that links action and reflection.

The eighth report, "communicating credibly", says new communications media, put to proper use, can enhance life rather than diminish it. But it notes the media are unevenly distributed and their control is in the hands of a few powerful countries and transnational corporations.

STATEMENT ON PEACE AND JUSTICE

The draft of the statement on peace and justice stirred lively debate, with some delegates calling for more emphasis on injustice as a threat to peace. Another point of contention was between those who hoped the Assembly would make a statement about the ultimate goal of peace, and others who advocate what they consider a more pragmatic approach. The question of whether the paper called for the churches to advocate unilateral disarmament, a point raised in the earlier discussion, did not emerge in the final discussion, although the paragraph some speakers believed to support the unilateral position remained in the document, along with an expanded section explaining it more fully.

“We call upon the churches, especially those in Europe, both East and West, and in North America”, the document says, “to redouble their efforts to convince their governments to reach a negotiated settlement and to turn away now, before it is too late, from plans to deploy additional or new nuclear weapons in Europe, and to begin immediately to reduce and then eliminate altogether present nuclear forces.”

The world economic crisis “has contributed to even greater injustice for the developing countries, denying millions of basic necessities for life”, the statement says, pointing out particularly “the link between the arms race and economic development, the effects of rising defence budgets . . . and the ensuing strain on the international system as a whole . . .”

Among other things, the document cites “blatant misuse of the concept of national security to justify repression, foreign intervention and spiralling arms budgets”. Security, it says, can be achieved “only as a common enterprise of nations”. Delegates also said “Christians should give witness to their willingness to participate in any conflict involving weapons of mass destruction or indiscriminate effect”, and called on churches to urge their respective governments to make provisions for the rights of conscientious objectors.

Other statements

A Middle East resolution encourages churches to have a wider awareness of the justice of the Palestinian cause. Another statement calls for mandatory and comprehensive sanctions against South Africa. A companion statement calls on member churches to deepen their solidarity with forces opposed to apartheid (race separation) and racism including UN-recognized liberation movements like SWAPO in Namibia.

The Assembly also expressed concern about nuclear testing in French Polynesia, endorsed Aboriginal rights in Canada, called for “immediate implementation” of UN resolutions on Cyprus, and expressed concern for the world’s 400 million undernourished.

PROGRAMME GUIDELINES FOR THE NEXT SEVEN YEARS

The guidelines to shape the programme of the World Council of Churches until its next Assembly in 1990 or 1991 recommended that all WCC activities in the coming years should be “inspired” by “growing towards”: unity, justice and peace, vital and coherent theology, new dimen-

sions of the churches' self-understanding, and a community of confessing and learning.

Gleaning trends and ideas from the many discussion sessions during the Assembly, the guidelines committee said top priority in the WCC should be given to the "search for concrete steps towards the goal of visible unity". Second priority was given to "fostering ecumenical relationships with and between churches, communities, groups and ecumenical organizations on all levels." Theological work was listed as a third priority, and after a debate the suggestion that a "theological advisory group" be formed survived an attempt to delete it from the report. The other five priorities are evangelism; "commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of all creation"; developing a community of "healing and sharing" with full participation of women, men, youth, children, the disabled and the laity; making concerns of women and ecumenical learning integral in all areas of WCC work.

OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE NEW CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Heinz Joachim Held, President of the foreign relations office of the Evangelical Church in (West) Germany (EKD), was elected moderator of the 145-member Central Committee. Elected Vice-Moderators were Sylvia Talbot, a US health education specialist, and Chrysostomos of Myra, Metropolitan Archbishop and President of the Pan-Christian Affairs Commission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Held, 55, is ordained and a member within the EKD of the (United) Evangelical Church in Hessen and Nassau. Talbot, 49, belongs to the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Chrysostomos, 62, is Eastern Orthodox.

Besides the officers, the Committee also elected its Executive Committee: Joyce Kaddu (Anglican, Uganda), Aaron Tolen (Reformed, Cameroon), Bena-Silu (Kimbanguist, Zaire), Annathaie Abayasekera (Anglican, Sri Lanka), Soritua A. E. Nababan (Lutheran, Indonesia), Puafitu Faa'alo (Reformed, Tuvalu), Jean Skuse (United, Australia), Janice Love (Methodist, USA), J. Oscar McCloud (Reformed, USA), Meinard Piske (Lutheran, Brazil), Bishop Athanasios (Oriental Orthodox, Egypt), Archbishop Kirill (Eastern Orthodox, USSR), Metropolitan Antonie (Eastern Orthodox, Romania), Harry Ashmall (Reformed, UK), Gunnar Stalsett (Lutheran, Norway), and Karoly Toth (Reformed, Hungary). Also on the new Executive Committee are the seven WCC presidents: Anglican Archbishop W. P. K. Makhulu (Botswana), Oriental Orthodox Metropolitan Paul Mar Gregorios (India), Methodist health consultant Nita Barrow (Barbados), Lutheran Bishop Johannes Hempel (GDR), Reformed educator Marga Bührig (Switzerland), former United Church of Canada Moderator Lois Wilson, and Eastern Orthodox Patriarch Ignatios IV (Syria).

NEW WCC STAFF APPROVED

The central committee approved the following WCC sub-unit directors: Faith and Order, Günter Gassman (Interconfessional Dialogue and Ecumenical Research Secretary, Studies Department, Lutheran World Federation); World Mission and Evangelism, Eugene Stockwell (Associate Gen-

eral Secretary, Overseas Ministries Division, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA); Church and Society, David Gosling (lecturer in Asian religion, University of Hull, England); and Christian Medical Commission, Eric Ram (CMC Associate Director). Respectively, they succeed William Lazareth, Emilio Castro, Paul Abrecht, and Stuart Kingma, who are retiring or taking new positions by the end of 1983.

Also approved were Thomas Best (associate professor of religion, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA) as a Faith and Order Executive Secretary; Gerhard Linn (a pastor from the GDR) as Secretary for Education and Mission; and Stuart Brown (regional programme officer in Dakar, Senegal, for the social sciences division of the International Development Research Centre) as Programme Secretary for Christian-Muslim relations.

International church consultation makes Middle East recommendations

A consultation of 50 church leaders from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, North America, and East and West Europe, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, has issued a message and four sets of recommendations on the situation in the Middle East.

Convened by the Middle East Council of Churches in cooperation with the World Council of Churches, the group, the "Consultation on Christian Presence and Witness in the Middle East," made suggestions about peace in the region, Lebanon, Jerusalem, and Christian-Jewish-Muslim relations.

Consultation participants called for peace negotiations including "all those parties most intimately involved: Israel, the PLO, neighbouring Arab states, the Soviet Union, and the United States," with "broader interests... best expressed through the United Nations". They suggested to the churches five steps "to facilitate the launching of such negotiations": to "encourage and facilitate the development of a dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis", for Christians outside the Middle East to "use what influence they have to create broad public support for a just solution to the Middle East conflict", a "more open and critical stance adopted by Christian churches in the traditional Jewish-Christian dialogue", to note "existing cooperation among all churches in the Middle East", and to "underline the importance of continuing this dialogue among Christian churches in the world".

The consultation also appealed to "all concerned parties to cooperate in efforts towards the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon" and urged Christians to "assist the people of Lebanon through rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts which affirm and preserve human and spiritual values". — EPS

World YWCA elects new General Secretary

Ms. Ruth Sovik has been elected general secretary of the World YWCA. Associate general secretary since 1980, she was chosen by the organization's executive committee at its annual meeting, in Annecy, France. Sovik has been acting general secretary since the resignation of her predecessor, Erica Brodie, last year. Before going to the World Y, she

served as deputy director of the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism.

Also at its meeting, the 20-member committee heard from some of the 19 YWCA representatives from 14 countries who returned 2 May from a two-week trip to Beirut, Amman and Jerusalem, where they met YWCA members and a variety of people whose lives had been affected by conflict in the region. The trip, a "Middle East encounter in search for peace and justice", climaxed a year-long process of education about the Middle East in dozens of local and national YWCAs around the world.

Sovik called the encounter the "first step in a process", and part of a "concerted effort to make a coordinated YWCA response to a huge, complicated world issue". She said the subject would be among the organization's priorities in the months and years ahead.

The committee completed planning for the quadrennial World Council of the World YWCA, in Singapore in November. An estimated 500 delegates and others from the 84 national associations of the organization are to take part in the two-week policy-making meeting. — EPS

Roman Catholic bishops issue letters on nuclear threat

The Roman Catholic bishops of several countries have issued statements on nuclear war.

In Chicago in May, US RC bishops overwhelmingly (238-9) ratified a revised third draft of a pastoral letter on "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response". Speaking "as pastors, not politicians," the bishops say that "good ends, defending one's country, protecting freedom, etc. cannot justify immoral means, the use of weapons which kill indiscriminately and threaten whole societies. We feel that our world and nation are headed in the wrong direction."

The statement was nearly two years in preparation, by a five-bishop drafting committee. Earlier drafts drew objections from representatives of the US government. They pronounced the final version better from their point of view, though it still takes positions contrary to those of the current US administration.

The bishops urge a "halt" in production and development of new nuclear weapons. They voice "strictly conditioned" acceptance of nuclear deterrents if linked to serious arms reduction talks. They say they cannot imagine a situation in which nuclear retaliation could be justified.

They observe that aspects of the nuclear policies of the Soviet Union and the US fail to meet the standards of the traditional Christian "just war" test. Affirming such a philosophy, the bishops also endorse the right of conscientious objection to military service and the right of individual Roman Catholics to be pacifists.

From Bonn, on the eve of the US bishops' vote, the West Germany's 68 RC bishops issued their own 70-page text on the subject. It does not condemn first-use of nuclear weapons and suggests three criteria by which nuclear deterrence could be justified — that it does not make nuclear war more probable, that it is connected with reduction of arms to the lowest possible level, and that it facilitates mutual arms control and disarmament.

From Budapest, Hungary's RC bishops praise the US bishops' position. In their pastoral letter, they "solemnly call: Stop the death-dealing weapons and rearmament". Other RC hierarchies which have spoken on the nuclear war question in recent months include those in GDR, Austria, France and England and Wales. The Dutch bishops are preparing a statement. — EPS

Church leaders: eliminate nuclear weapons by 1988

A four-day gathering in Uppsala, Sweden, 20-23 April, of church leaders from 60 countries urged "controlled and verifiable measures of multilateral disarmament leading to the total elimination of all nuclear weapons within five years". The message of the Christian World Conference on Life and Peace was approved by virtually all the approximately 150 church leaders who attended it. There was one negative vote and eight abstentions.

The group's document deals with "the Christian concern for life and peace", five "specific issues", ways of "challenging governments" and "guidelines for action by the churches".

A section which occasioned major discussion in the conference drafting committee and in plenary sessions discusses "the doctrine of nuclear deterrence". In the end, the group accepted language which describes the doctrine as "increasingly dubious and dangerous from every point of view. Most of us believe," it continues, "that from the Christian standpoint, reliance upon the threat and possible use of nuclear weapons is unacceptable as a way of avoiding war. Some are willing to tolerate nuclear deterrence only as a temporary measure in the absence of alternatives."

The section adds that for "most of us... the possession of nuclear weapons is inconsistent with our faith in God, our concept of creation and with our membership in Christ's universal body... Most of us... believe... the existence of these weapons contradicts the will of God. For all of us, obedience to that will demands a resolute effort within a specified time-limit for their total elimination."

The document urges five "interim measures" — a "freeze on further manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons", "immediate agreement" on a treaty banning all nuclear tests coupled with "effective non-proliferation measures", nuclear-free zones, "effective unilateral actions for peace and disarmament", and "pledges by governments for no first use of nuclear weapons". — EPS

140,000 attend FRG Kirchentag

About 140,000 people participated in the 20th national Protestant Kirchentag ("church days") held in Hannover, 8-12 June 1983, under the theme "turn and live". Among the participants nearly a third were under 25.

Early morning Bible studies were filled beyond capacity, with an average of 60,000 attendees. Subthemes for the Kirchentag were "trusting in Christ", "renewing the church", "sharing with one another", "making peace" and "preserving creation". The number participating in the working groups was so high that it was difficult to estimate. The Kirchentag's Bible

studies, working groups, worship services and eucharist celebrations drew large crowds.

Opening worship services were held in 88 congregations and large crowds attended the communion services held in 127 congregations. The closing ceremony was a eucharist, in which some 90,000 participated. It is supposed to be the largest service ever held in the Reformation churches. Prayer, meditation, silence and pastoral care were essential components of the church event. The "hall of silence" received over 25,000 visitors daily.

The Kirchentag included a "market of possibilities" with over 300 booths, which provided opportunities for dialogue. Over 90,000 violet handkerchiefs were sold with the slogan "turn and live — it's time for an unequivocal no for weapons of mass destruction". The violet colour is the traditional liturgical colour for repentance. Parallel to the Kirchentag was a disciplined and peaceful demonstration for world peace involving some 90,000 people. Three church leaders — US Roman Catholic Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, FRG Evangelical Bishop Kurt Scharf of Berlin, and GDR Evangelical Regional Dean Heino Falcke of Berlin led the demonstration, which concluded with an agape (love feast) for peace. — EPS

GDR Kirchentag

The second of seven regional Kirchentage ("church days") planned for the GDR (German Democratic Republic) this year attracted more than 2,000 participants for its full three days (10-12 June), and upwards of 25,000 for the outdoor eucharist on the final day. It was held in Rostock.

Participants came from various parts of the northern GDR to the downtown parking lot for the eucharist. Some travelled in six specially reserved train cars arranged by the GDR state railway. The Kirchentag itself took place in the local congress hall, which the sponsoring churches were able to rent — another sign of the current status of GDR church-state relations. At the train station and other locations, Kirchentag publicity was posted, including announcements of the closing service.

Young people made up more than half of those who participated in the whole event, which included lectures, Bible studies, an ecumenical forum, home discussion groups, worship services, meditations and prayer, all related to the theme "daring to trust". One lecturer, a church superintendent from Karl Marx Stadt, said the church should not "demonize" power and the powerful, noting that the state and society see the church as a power. "But power must be offered in an atmosphere of trust, and it is we who have the chance to tell the powerful what bothers us," the superintendent continued. "Therefore, we must ask for trust, for more trust brings more togetherness and security." — EPS

Significant Ecumenical Journals

Table of Contents

CONTACTS, Vol. XXXV, No. 122, 1983

Liminaire

Jésus-Christ, Vie du Monde: une approche théologico-spirituelle orthodoxe, *par* Dan-Ilie Ciobotea

«Tout est accompli», *par* Olivier Clément

I. V. Kireievsky: Fragments, *trad. par* Michel Evdokimov

L'évolution de la «Légende d'Abgar» et les origines de l'iconographie chrétienne, *par* Dominique Cerbelaud

Chronique

Les femmes dans l'œuvre de Tolstoï, *par* Marie Sémon

L'unité dans la diversité: La vocation orthodoxe en Europe occidentale, *par* Evêque Kallistos Ware

Bibliographie

Pour que l'homme devienne Dieu, *par* F. Brune

Les starets Ambroise d'Optino, *par* John B. Dunlop

Vie de l'icône en Occident (Messenger orthodoxe N° 92)

Quand la nuée se levait, *par* Bruno Hussar

THE ECUMENIST, Vol. 21, No. 1, November-December 1982

Neo-Conservatives in the Church, *by* Norman Faramelli

Catholic Reappraisals of Luther, *by* Gary K. Waite

Thomas McGrady, American Catholic Socialist, *by* Toby Terrar

THE ECUMENIST, Vol. 21, No. 2, January-February 1983

After Twenty-Years, *by* Gregory Baum
Schillebeeckx' Dialogue with Critical Theory, *by* William L. Portier

Shadows of Deindustrialization, *by* Charles W. Rawlings

THE ECUMENIST, Vol. 21, No. 3, March-April 1983

The Churches and Economic Crisis, *by* Lee Cormie

New Jewish Religious Voices III, *by* Gregory Baum

French Catholic Ecumenism, *by* George H. Tavard

Toward a Strategic Theology, *by* Gregory Baum

ESPRIT. Avril 1983

Aux origines du sionisme politique: Théodore Herzl, Israël Zangwill et la négation de Sion, *par* Uri Eisenzweig

Le retour de la Diaspora, *par* Bernard Chaouat

Quartier cousin, Les immigrés de la deuxième génération, *par* Ahmed Boubeker

Militants islamistes d'Egypte, *par* Saad Eddin Ibrahim

Poèmes, *par* Jean-Pierre Lemaire

Les héros de notre époque, *par* Jan Patocka

Jan Patocka sur la ligne de front..., *par* Olivier Mongin

Zionoviev, observateur, théoricien et moraliste, *par* Anne-Marie Roviello

La nostalgie de la zone (Zionoviev), *par* Michel Heller

Reportage derrière les verrous, *par* Wlademar Kuczynski

ESPRIT. Mai-juin 1983

LE PROCHE-ORIENT DANS LA GUERRE

1. *Israël entre l'ethnique et la politique*

Impasses politiques

Une crise profonde, *par* Charles Bloch

Le Grand Israël en marche, *par* Jean-François Legrain

D'un exil à l'autre, *par* Olivier Mongin

Le sionisme écartelé

Religion et politique en Israël, entretien avec Stéphane Mosès

Sionisme et mémoire juive, entretien avec Alex Derczansky

2. *Le Liban mutilé*

Une guerre sans miracle

La cité-Etat, Beyrouth entre deux formes de résistance, *par* Percy Kemp

Idées reçues sur une guerre, *par* Jean-Pierre Péroncel-Hugoz

Les avatars du multiconfessionnalisme

Du régime communautaire au confessionnalisme, *par* Edmond Rabbath

La coexistence religieuse et son histoire, *par* Michel Marian

Entre l'éclatement et la fusion, *par* Nassif Nassar

Du libanisme à la libanité, Réflexions sur la minorité chrétienne, *par* Georges Corm

Lettre de Cornet Chahwane, *par* Pharès Zoghbi

3. *Le Proche-Orient dans la guerre*

L'effervescence minoritaire, La guerre du Liban et ses dialectiques minoritaires, *par* Amr Helmy Ibrahim

Toujours la question d'Orient, *par* Michel Marian

4. *Sursauts monothéistes*

L'Islam et ses métamorphoses

Les Frères musulmans et le Moyen-Orient, *par* Pierre-Jean Luizard

Laïcité, religiosité et politiques islamistes, *par* Amr Helmy Ibrahim

Islam et démocratie, *par* Jean-François Clément

Les trois dimensions de l'islam, *par* Jean-François Clément

L'abrahamisme déserté

Dialogues tronqués, *par* Khaled Roumo

5. *Orient-Occident, chocs et discordances*

Les grincements de la stratégie

L'après Camp David, *par* Jacques Ver-
nant

Perspectives régionales, table ronde avec Gérard Chaliand, Jean-Paul Charnay, Yves Lacoste, Michel Marian et Philippe Rondot

La Palestine victime de l'Unité arabe?, *par* Eric Vigne

L'Orient... après l'Occident

Le nouvel orientaliste, *par* Percy Kemp

La double illusion, ni Orient, ni Occident, *par* Olivier Mongin

Cette mer qui mène à l'autre, *par* André Miquel

ESPRIT. Juillet 1983

La valeur chez les modernes et chez les autres, *par* Louis Dumont

Le dilemme brésilien, *par* Roberto Da Matta

Ambiguïtés brésiliennes, *par* João Fatela

La Nouvelle droite fait son chemin, *par* Yves Plasseraud

Patrimoine génétique et développement humain, *par* Denis Buican

Au-delà du pacifisme

De l'équilibre de la terreur à la terreur de l'équilibre?, *par* Pierre Hassner

PC, PS: une ligne peut en cacher une autre, *par* Nicole Gnesotto

Les évêques américains entre la guerre juste et le pacifisme, *par* Paul Thibaud

Le néo-nationalisme allemand et les pacifistes, *par* Sigrid Meuschel

D'une Nouvelle gauche à une autre, *par* Dick Howard

JOURNAL OF ECUMENICAL STUDIES. Vol. XX, No. 1, Winter 1983

The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue, *by* Leonard Swidler

Jewish-Christian Relations: a Jewish Perspective, *by* David Berger

An Evangelical Version of the "Double Covenant": New Possibilities for Jewish-Fundamentalist Dialogue, *by* Robert M. Price

Materialism and the Christian Left: Rethinking Christian Use of Marx, *by* Nancy Bancroft

Can a Roman Catholic be an Historian?, *by* Philip Devenish

Can a Roman Catholic be an Historian? A Response to Philip Devenish, *by* David L. Schindler

Explorations and Responses

Self-critique, a Necessity for Dialogue, *by* Leonard Swidler

A Rejoinder to Brian Tierney, *by* James L. Heft

Doing our own Homework: Fifteen Steps Toward Christian-Jewish Dialogue in Local Congregations, *by* Philip Culbertson

Ecumenical Events

Jewish-Catholic Conference on Critical Life Issues, *by* Norma Schlager

Kentucky Conference on Baptism, *by* Hal S. Daniel, Jr.

Conference of Global Congress of the World's Religions, *by* Henry O. Thompson

A Forum on the World Council of Churches, *by* George C. Papademetriou

MID-STREAM. Vol. XXII, Nos. 3 & 4, July/October, 1983

Ecumenism Among the North American Churches and Societies

The Questions of Pluralism: the Context of the United States, *by* David Tracy

America Revisited: a Definition of Context, *by* Henry J. Ferry

Five Questions for North American Christians, *by* Lois M. Wilson

An Historical Perspective on Evangelicalism and Ecumenism, *by* Timothy L. Smith

The Role of the Laity in American Christianity, *by* Karl H. Hertz

Canadian Churches in the Political Culture, *by* David MacDonald

The Churches in Canadian Space and Time, *by* John Webster Grant

The Contributions of Women to North American Church Life, *by* Barbara Brown Zikmund

Black Religion, *by* J. Deotis Roberts

The Neo-Evangelical Alternative: (Re)Discovering a Social Gospel, *by* H. Wayne Pipkin

Piety, Federalism, and the Shaping of US Politics, *by* Paul Kleppner

Impulses Toward Christian Unity in Nineteenth Century America, *by* Paul A. Crow, Jr.

Documents

1983 WCC Presidents' Pentecost Message (World Council of Churches)

Ecumenism: A Lutheran Commitment (Lutheran Church in America)

Faith and Order Report to Governing Board (National Council of Churches)

Events in the Oikoumene

The Conference of European Churches, *by* Mary Tanner

World Conference on Life and Peace: Uppsala, 1983, *by* Paul A. Crow, Jr.

Together — Again!, *by* Lewis Wilkins

THE MONTH. April 1983

Towards Co-Responsibility in N. Ireland, *by* Brian Lennon SJ

Spirituality and Liberation, *by* Aloysius Pieris SJ

Development of Doctrine and Church Vitality, *by* John E. Thiel

Second Thoughts on the Pope's Visit, *by* M. P. Hornsby-Smith and others

THE MONTH. May 1983

Canterbury and Rome: Progress and Problems, *by* Henry Chadwick

The Rome Connection in History, *by* Alberic Stacpoole OSB

Sign of Contradiction on Merseyside, *by* Dennis Chiles

People and Resources: a Reappraisal, *by* Albert Nevett SJ

Vitality as an Ecclesial Virtue, *by* Paul Lakeland

THE MONTH. June 1983

The Church After the Election

Insolvent Nations: the Moral Issues, *by* Rudi WeisweilerThe Bishop of Rome's Jurisdiction, *by* Alberic Stacpoole OSBBefore the Pope's Polish Visit, *by* Jonathan LuxmooreThree Decades of British Painting, *by* Martin Holman

THE MONTH. July 1983

Reagan and the Church

Thoughts About Hanging

Developments in Faith, *by* Marion SmithReforming the Monetary System, *by* Rudi WeisweilerChristianity and Marxism, *by* Frederick C. Copleston S.J.Business and Social Change, *by* G. R. DunstanSpirits on the Move, *by* Thomas Kretz SJ

THE NORTH INDIA CHURCHMAN. Vol. XIII, No. 4, April 1983

Christianity in India at the Cross-Roads, *by* Mathai ZachariahChristians and Churches in Socialist Countries: review *by* Russel Davies

ÖKUMENISCHE RUNDSCHAU. Vol. 32, No. 2, April 1983

Bekenntnis und Toleranz, *von* Werner KruscheZu einem Leben in Gemeinschaft berufen, *von* Heinz Joachim HeldDie VI. Vollversammlung des ÖRK und die römisch-katholische Kirche, *von* Aloys KleinÖkumene in der DDR am Beispiel Vancouver, *von* Gerhard ThomasEkklesiologische Konsequenzen der Leuenberger Konkordie, *von* Wenzel LohffTheologischer Dialog zwischen der Dritten und Ersten Welt, *von* Erhard Kamphausen

ÖKUMENISCHE RUNDSCHAU. Vol. 32, No. 3, July 1983

Lima — Vancouver — und danach. Die Rolle von Glauben und Kirchenverfassung, *von* Günther GassmannZur Arbeit der Gemeinsamen Arbeitsgruppe Genf — Rom, *von* Konrad RaiserMartin Luther und die Ostkirche, *von* Viorel MehedintuWelche Ökumene für Lateinamerika?, *von* Jean-Pierre BastianGibt es asiatische unabhängige Kirchen?, *von* Niels-Peter Moritzen

ONE IN CHRIST. Vol. XIX, No. 2, 1983

Paul Couturier: a Heritage of Prayer, *by* Henry R. T. Brandreth, OGSMethodism's Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation, *by* Geoffrey WainwrightCatholic and Protestant, *by* Adrian HastingsTheologians in Troubled Waters: Ecumenical Ripples, *by* Patrick CrowleyThe Creative Edge: United Churches and the Christian World Communions, *by* Michael KinnamonElements of Monastic Spirituality in Protestant Intentional Communities, *by* William Loyd Allen*Ecumenical Notes and Documentation*The Christian Presence in Further Education, *by* Gordon Harrison and Ian D. Corbett

Roman Catholic/Orthodox Joint Commission: The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity

Cardinal Hume's Address at St Paul's

British Church Leaders' Visit to Rome

ARCIC-II: United and Roman Catholic Approaches to Church Union

UNA SANCTA. Vol. 38, No. 1, 1983

Zum Geleit, *von* Gerhard Voss, NiederaltaichZur Besinnung. Cui bono? — Eine ökumenische Parabel, *von* W. Marxsen/P. Lengsfeld

Gestaltungen des Glaubens

Teresa von Avila und Martin Luther, von R. Garcia Mateo

Ursprünge lutherischer Spiritualität, von Friedrich Beisser

Protestantismus als Lebensstil. Anmerkungen zur reformatorischen Spiritualität, von Hans-Martin Barth

Kirchlichkeit als bestimmendes Element katholischer Spiritualität, von Heinrich Petri

Die ökumenische Relevanz der orthodoxen Spiritualität, von Johannes Panagopolus

Synodalität und Rezeption. Am Beispiel der II. Panorthodoxen Präkonziliaren Konferenz, 3.-12.9.1982, Chambésy/Genf, von Athanasio Basdekis

Dokumentation

Die Beschlüsse der II. Panorthodoxen Präkonziliaren Konferenz

Berichte

Athoserneuerung und Ökumenismus, von E. C. Suttner

Zum Abschlussbericht der anglikanisch-katholischen Kommission, von J. Lüticken

Weltgebetstag der Frauen — eine internationale Bewegung, von A. v. Guttenberg

UNA SANCTA. Vol. 38, No. 2, 1983

Zum Geleit, von Gerhard Voss, Niederaltaich

Zur Besinnung. «All meine Quellen entspringen in dir», von Ursula Blum

Israel — biblisch

Die Landverheissungen im Alten Testament und ihre Bedeutung für die Gegenwart, von Claus Westermann

Kirche und Israel in neutestamentlicher Perspektive, von Franz Mussner

Wunden der Geschichte

Herausforderungen, die wir prüfen müssen, von Kardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger

Antijudaismus in der Geschichte der Kirche, von Harold H. Ditmanson

Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern, von Micha Brumlik

Israel im Dialog

Israel und Palästina. Gemeinsame Perspektiven zum Konflikt im Nahen Osten, von Lukas Vischer. In Verbindung mit einer Arbeitsgruppe

Ökumenische Erwägungen zum jüdisch-christlichen Dialog, erarbeitet von der ÖRK-Konsultation Kirche und Judentum

Marienverehrung

Katholische Bemerkungen zu: Maria — Evangelische Fragen und Gesichtspunkte, von Gerhard Voss

Eucharistie

Die eucharistische Liturgie von Lima. Einführende Bemerkungen, von Max Thurian

Die eucharistische Liturgie (Text)

Bibliographia Oecumenica

Significant Ecumenical Titles Available in the World Council of Churches

HEADINGS OF THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

- I. History of the Ecumenical Movement**
 - (a) Biographies
 - (b) Current Trends and Evaluations
 - (c) Vancouver, 1983
- II. World Council of Churches**
- III. Ecumenical Studies**
 - (a) Faith and Order
 - (b) Church and Society
 - (c) Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies
 - (d) Race Relations
 - (e) Development of Peoples
 - (f) Human Rights
- (g) Renewal of the Life of the Church
- (h) The Healing Community
- IV. Mission and Evangelism**
- V. Education**
- VI. National and Regional Councils of Churches**
- VII. World Confessional Movements**
- VIII. The Church in Contemporary Situations**
- IX. The Church in Historical Perspectives**
- X. Contemporary Theological Discussions**
- XI. Crucial World Problems**
- XII. The Study of Other Religions**

I. History of the Ecumenical Movement

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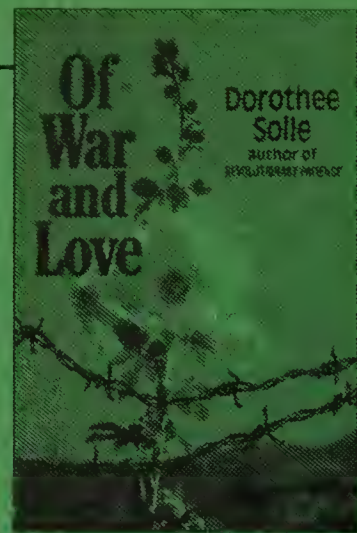
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